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REFLECTIVE PROCESSES: PORTALS INTO TRANSFORMATION

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the kinds of reflection that are associated with a transformative experience. A detailed literature review explored Mezirow's theory and the criticisms. Using the conceptual umbrella of Mezirow and a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology, three participants shared their transformative experiences through an interviewing process.

Themes emerged which indicated the presence of content, process, and premise reflection, and supported Mezirow's conceptual description. Meaning scheme transformations were detected through content and process reflections, and meaning perspective transformations were detected through premise reflections.

Mezirow's theory did not seem to account for two different types of transformations. Premise reflections of an epistemic nature and the use of presentational construal may account for how the reflective processes change. The themes from this study also suggested that content reflection may not precipitate a meaning scheme transformation without the presence of process reflection.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Robert Persig (1991) aptly captures the essence of transformation by suggesting that learning is analogous to:

> the 'high country' of mountain climbing. It takes a lot of effort to get there and more effort when you arrive, but unless you make the journey you are confined to one valley of thought all your life. This high country passage [allows] entry to another valley of thought in which the facts of life get a much richer interpretation. The valley spreads out into a huge fertile plain of understanding. (p. 149)

This thesis is about the reflective journeys people take to arrive at that fertile plain of understanding. At some point, we come to realize that our research is a journey that tells a story about ourselves as well as others. The research mirrors our interests; the questions we ask indicate that which we might like to know; and the choices we make unfold as an examination of the embedded structures of our knowledge. Therefore, as Van Mannen (1990) suggests, "to orient oneself to a phenomenon always implies a particular interest, station or vantage point in life" (p. 40). My particular orientation is that of "learner," and the particular phenomenon I orient toward is transformative learning; accordingly, my research is a quest to understand the experiences of myself and others through the reflective processes that are associated with transformative learning.

Perhaps the greatest challenge of "doing the thesis" within this topical framework lies not in the instrumental steps of performing the actions required for completion, but rather in recognizing and comprehending how our particular orientation influences and determines our location in life. There is an unalterable merge of the personal and social, the rational and spiritual, and the causal and situational proponents of learning and life which create a set of tensions that merit investigative research. Yet these various layers and functions seem to mesh together so intrinsically that purposeful isolation of the strands distorts the essence of learning. What emerges throughout this thesis is the sense of interdependence between the layers. To this extent, transformative learning as a topic appears to address multi-leveled functions: a legitimate inquiry into educational experiences; an insightful query into human behavior; and, a means to understand and promote self-growth.

In this introductory chapter the reader will find the purpose of the research, a section which situates the researcher in the content of the thesis, origins of the research, research parameters, limitations of the research, and a brief outline of the remaining chapters.

Purpose of the Research

Within the field of adult education, the work of Mezirow has stimulated a generous amount of critical debate and research involving the area of transformative learning. The essential premise within his interpretation of transformation is that significant learning occurs through the examination of uncritically assimilated meaning structures. The result constitutes a "transformed" set of beliefs and assumptions which are more permeable, more open to ideas which may differ from our own, and display greater flexibility. The process which guides this re-examination is reflection, and according to Mezirow (1991a; all future references to Mezirow 1991 will be 1991a unless otherwise indicated), may be of three kinds: content, process, and premise. However, the pervasive reference to reflection within adult education often seems to occur in an uncritically assimilated manner; that is, much of the field uses the term, and its associated connotations, without clear indication of its origins or attention paid to the nuances contained within the differing interpretations.

The intent of this research is to utilize the conceptual framework based on Mezirow's interpretation of transformative learning in order to explore transformative experiences and guide the research agenda. The principal focus of this exploration pivots around aspects of the experiences which most clearly illuminate the essence of reflection. To this extent, the research is less concerned with developing the overall process of transformation; it is more concerned with peeling back the layers of the experiences to illuminate evidence of different kinds of reflection. This means that what the participants report is really *reflections about their reflections*; that is, they are recollecting past experiences in light of a current understanding. As Van Manen (1990) indicates, accessing these kinds of processes pose a laborious and difficult research task; however, the goal of this research is to elucidate, by using the conceptual umbrella provided by Mezirow in combination with a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology, variations in the reflective processes that are part of a transformative experience. Within the context of this thesis, reflection refers to the intentional activities that stimulate the intellect and the affect to explore learning experiences which lead to the development of new meanings (e.g. Boud, Keogh, and Walker, 1985; Mezirow, 1991). The relationship between reflection and learning unfolds as the ways in which we come to use the new meanings. Mezirow (1990) tells us that:

> To make meaning means to make sense of an experience; we make an interpretation of it. When we subsequently use this interpretation to guide decision making or action, then making meaning becomes learning. We learn differently when we are learning to perform than when we are learning to understand what is being communicated to us. Reflection enables us to correct distortions in our beliefs and errors in problem solving. Critical reflection involves a critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs have been built. (p. 1)

To this extent, reflection has a significant potential to guide and enhance learning, and therefore should be a central concern of adult education.

There are two purposes for conducting this research. The first involves my personal interest in developing a firm conceptual understanding of the literature surrounding the Mezirowian interpretation of transformative learning; the reader will find this purpose explicated in Chapter 2 of this thesis. The second purpose involves a deliberate intent to learn more about the kinds of reflection that are associated with transformative experiences; the reader will find this purpose explicated in the remainder of Chapter 1, and Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 of this thesis.

Significance of Research

The notions of transformation and reflection are intrinsically embedded in the culture of everyday life: they appear through novels, movies, research articles, narratives. We are bombarded with variations in what the terms mean, how they unfold, and how we should respond. Even within the academy of adult education, the terms are often not understood; therefore, gaining a clearer understanding of transformative experiences and reflection is valuable to personal spheres as well as adult education in general. The pervasive use of reflection within adult education promotes the need for adult educators to be more aware of the ways in which it influences the construal of meaning, and ultimately, the process of learning. The significance of this research emerges as an attempt to address the problem concerning the lack of empirical investigation into the various forms of reflection. The reader will find the significance more clearly explicated in Chapter 2, which is the literature review. Following from the purpose and significance of the research described above, the following research question guides this study:

> What are the kinds of reflection that are associated with a transformative experience?

Interpreting Meaning from the Research

This study employed an hermeneutic phenomenological methodology to access the experiences of the participants. Meaning emerged from these stories as a series of themes which connect the respective participant's story into a readable narrative. Although the themes represent the essence of the transformative experience, they also illuminate those aspects of the transformation which most clearly indicate the reflective processes utilized by the participant. How the themes emerged and how the researcher interpreted this meaning is explicated in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Situating the Researcher in the Content of the Thesis

Conducting qualitative research typically unfolds as an exploration of ourselves in relation to the topic. As Van Manen (1990) indicates, the starting point of "research is largely a matter of identifying what it is that deeply interests you or me..." (p. 40). Steier (1991) states that "by examining how we are a part of our data, our research becomes, not a self-centered product, but a reciprocal process" (p. 7) between the personal experiences of the researcher and the research itself. To this extent, it is important to identify three incidents from my personal experience relative to transformation and reflection.

The first incident precipitated what Mezirow might term an example of process reflection; in this situation, I began to examine how I construed meaning from my experiences. During a class discussion in a History course I was taking at the Red Deer College over 20 years ago, the conversation centered around whether or not law enforcement officers had the right to break the law in order to enforce it. I offered a rather opinionated version of why I thought they did possess that right. When I finished, the professor simply leaned back in his chair and asked if anyone had any problems with what I had said. The following 30 minutes of class time consisted of two basic processes: other students finding considerable error in my opinion, and me sinking lower and lower into my chair. Although it was humiliating at the time, I reflect on that situation as being perhaps the most significant learning experience I have encountered. I realized that my own opinion did not constitute universal "truth," and in this sense I began to understand the merit of challenging my personal sets of assumptions about how I determined meaning, as well as the value of listening to other people's perspectives.

The second incident occurred shortly thereafter when I began reading Marilyn Ferguson's The Aquarian Conspiracy (1980), and represented something more like content reflection. Her investigation into the "pockets of transformation" that were taking place over North America provided me with a slightly different interpretation of what life has the potential to become. Perhaps the most significant influences Ferguson had on me was the realization that it was acceptable to listen to the internal forces of emotion and spirituality, and that life did not always have to conform to societal expectations, which in my case, emerged from small town and essentially rural Alberta. There were other ways in which people's lives could unfold, and ones which possibly were more rewarding.

The third incident occurred when my marriage dissolved, and this eventually pushed me into premise reflections about social expectations, about psychological characteristics of myself, and deeper layers about the ways in which I perceived meaning. At this point, I found myself coming to grips with yet more realizations: the institution of marriage was not "forever," and that my part in the marriage was not infallible. Not only did I find myself without a partner, but I found myself without a clear definition of what it means to "be a partner."

Within a relatively short time span, I had experienced three incidents which caused significant disturbances in my life, all of which challenged my belief systems concerning myself, my expectations of life, and my expectations of others. Unknown to me at the time, I experienced what I would now refer to as a "disorienting dilemma." My response to this "dilemma" was to engage in an inward journey; in essence, an examination of myself, my interaction with others, my fundamental belief structures, and the various ways in which all three interacted with one another. I developed a generous respect for the process of reflection. The experiences which prompted the inward journey are not remarkable in and of themselves, nor are they specific only to me. However, how one acts upon such discoveries states more than the simple recognition that one has experienced some form of change. During conversations with my friends, they recognized numerous changes in me: I was more tolerant of ambiguity, interested in different things, and generally more open to differing opinions.

These experiences tended to accumulate through, and within, an educational setting. My undergraduate degree in psychology fueled my interests in the processes of social behavior and interaction; accordingly, I gravitated toward the area of social psychology. I was introduced to a body of research that focuses on the processes of how and why people arrive at decisions, and perform actions related to those decisions, within the social arena. Two years after completing my undergraduate degree, I enrolled in the Adult Education Masters program. Within this program, I was formally introduced the social aspects of education, qualitative research methodologies, and the general topic of transformation. Collectively, these influences provided a framework under which my interests and my desire to continue academic pursuits could unfold in a constructive manner.

Origins of the Research

Embarking on the journey of conducting qualitative research involved my understanding of social constructionism. The process of understanding "reality" as being construed through two distinct but inter-related interpretations, namely the Habermasian concepts of lifeworld and system, clearly accentuates the need for what Steier (1991) refers to as reflexivity, or the "turning-back of one's experience upon oneself" (p. 2). In doing so, we are presented with the opportunity to re-evaluate our positions on any number of issues; indeed, the process is highly similar to what Mezirow (1991) refers to as premise reflection. In this sense, critical social theory, and consequently the work of Mezirow, became integrated with my understanding of the research.

Van Manen's Researching Lived Experience (1990) was suggested as a potential resource by one of the people with whom I conversed about research issues. Much to my delight, Van Manen's conception of hermeneutic phenomenology closely parallels the transformative processes described by Mezirow. Furthermore, he offers a methodology, and the consequent methods associated with that methodology, which cleanly blend into the topical area of transformative learning. This mixture provides an opportunity for the research to center on Steier's notion of reflexivity discussed earlier; that is, the act of doing the research becomes a "micro-transformative" process in which the topic and methodology inherently complement each other. This idea that the methodology reflects the topic is developed in greater detail in Chapter 3. Through the dialogic process with others, realizations concerning my understanding of the material, and lengthy reflection, I developed a thesis outline that served both my own interests and met the required research criteria.

Research Parameters

The following research parameters are present in this study: researcher's preparedness for conducting research, the assumptions of the research, and the scope of the research. Each of these assist in determining the credibility of the researcher.

Researcher Preparedness

It is important to develop the necessary research skills specific to the selected methodology. To these purposes, I have taken a qualitative research course which emphasized a "generic" method of working within this paradigm. The course also offered discussion of specific qualitative methodologies, and culminated with a large project designed to hone the research skills. I also have participated in a large research project that required the analysis of large amounts of data, and this helped to develop further qualitative analysis skills. Through course work, extensive readings, and dialogues, I feel prepared to conduct this research using a phenomenological hermeneutic methodology.

Assumptions of the Research

One of the fundamental premises of qualitative research is the need for the researcher to identify the assumptions and biases which influence the work. Van Manen (1990) aptly states:

> It is better to make explicit our understandings, beliefs, biases, assumptions, presuppositions, and theories. We try to come to terms with our assumptions, not in order to forget them again, but rather to hold them deliberately at bay and even to turn this knowledge against itself, as it were, thereby exposing its shallow or concealing character." (p. 47)

To this extent, the following assumptions influence this research:

1) Philosophical:
    - It is possible to interpret the world through two distinct but related realities.
    - Knowledge can both exist as part of a physical and natural order, and be socially constructed.
    - Seeking to understand philosophical assumptions is a worthwhile endeavor.
2) Social:
    - Participation in dialogic experiences may assist in understanding our assumptions.
    - In order for people to validate their ideas, they must be expressed in the social arena through the use of language.
3) Research Related:
    - The nature of the research question guides the selection of research methodology.
    - People possess the ability to reflect upon their experiences, and challenge their assumptions and beliefs to the point where they may be transformed.
    - People possess the ability to recall these reflections, and identify important aspects and relationships of the reflective processes.

Scope of the Research

The scope of this research is limited to a specified number of individuals who possess post secondary education, feel they have undergone a transformative experience, have had the opportunity to reflect upon those experiences, and are over 35 years of age. No attempt is made to make statements about the population in general.

Limitations

Although the assumptions identified above impose certain limitations on the research, there exist a number of other factors which also contribute to limitations. These include researcher biases and interviewing skills.

Researcher Biases

A number of personal biases of the researcher have the potential to influence this study, and these are identified below in list form.

1. Through personal experiences, I strongly believe that not all people have the capacity or desire to engage in the level of reflection necessary to undergo the kind of premise transformation described by Mezirow.
2. I consider theoretical and conceptual avenues to be important; consequently, I firmly believe that theory provides a significant framework for conducting research.

3. I consider my past experiences and periods of reflection to constitute a transformative experience according to Mezirow's theory about transformation.

Interviewing Skills

As part of my preparation, I read numerous articles about interviewing, and dialogued with other researchers about their experiences. My intention was to seek the research participants' stories and thought processes through their own words and in a manner where they felt comfortable. I attempted to bracket my own biases as much as possible to allow the voices of the participants to come forward, and I also attempted to probe their stories as deeply as possible to gain access to their transformative experiences.

Thesis Outline

Throughout the remainder of this thesis, the reader can anticipate the following order of chapters. Chapter 2 presents a detailed review of the literature surrounding Mezirow's interpretation of transformative learning, and includes a critique of that literature and a section which firmly locates the current research. Chapter 3 describes the methodology, and provides the reader with a brief philosophical background of phenomenology and hermeneutics as well as indicating the exact methods used in this research. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 present the research data in thematic form, and Chapter 4 includes a brief preface to the data chapters for the benefit of the reader. Chapter 7 integrates the data with the theory.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

There exists a substantial body of literature within the field of adult education which attempts to address the various dimensions of change that we as adults undergo throughout our lives spans. One such body of literature tends to cluster around the terms "transformation, transformative learning, and transformative education" (e.g. Boyd & Meyers, 1988; Mezirow, 1981, 1990, 1991; Taylor, 1995). Each of these terms infer that a change or alteration occurs to some component of the self, either cognitive or deeper within the psyche, which allows for greater understanding of ourselves and our relationships with others, and generally promotes an improvement of psycho-social states. During these changes, "the individual reveals critical insights, develops fundamental understandings and acts with integrity .... and it would follow that educators should be interested in the educational aspects of transformation" (Boyd & Meyers, 1988, p. 262).

Despite the obvious value of placing transformative issues within an adult educational context, the idea has only recently gained momentum through the work of Mezirow. The 1978 publication of his initial research involving the experiences of women participating in college re-entry programs situated transformation as being a relevant and beneficial addition to the field of adult education. The subsequent dialogue within the literature, and Mezirow's continuing efforts to refine his ideas, have culminated with a theory about transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991). Not only is the theory a welcome addition to the somewhat atheoretical positions adopted by much of adult education (e.g. Rubenson, 1982; Welton, 1987), but it establishes a platform on which differing interpretations of transformation are allowed to surface (e.g. Dirkx, Cunningham, Hart, Mezirow, & Scott, 1993). As a result of the continuing dialogue, two broad interpretations of transformation emerge.

The first interpretation advocates a personal transformation which utilizes the premises of analytical depth and transpersonal psychology, and purports transformative learning to be a development of consciousness (Harding, 1965; Whitmont, 1991) or a process in self-transcendence (Wilbur, 1985). This interpretation is usually referred to as transformation for the development of consciousness. Generally speaking, this position assumes the Self to be a complex psychic structure which is not limited to conscious awareness, but includes a matrix of elements which collectively influence our behavior. The dynamic between these structures manifests as an intra-psychic dialogue which tends to break away boundaries between these structures, and allow for a greater understanding of the Self. This dialogue often occurs as a violent eruption of seemingly unexplainable emotion forcing its way into conscious awareness which comes to be understood through the analysis of emotional content, feelings, and dream analysis. According to Boyd and Meyers (1988), the process which governs this dialogue is discernment, and includes three activities: receptivity, recognition, and grieving. Within this interpretation, the goal of transformation "is not primarily rational clarity but a commitment to an altered way of being with one's Self in the world" (p. 276). It is an extra-rational, image based process that provides for the "non-egoic processes of learning…and the emotional and spiritual dimensions that seem to be a critical aspect of transformative learning experiences" (Dirkx, 1998; p. 1).

Although these ideas have long existed within the realm of therapeutic analysis, it is only recently that they have been expressed as having legitimate value in more formal arenas of adult education. Discussing numerous studies under the broad theme "other ways of knowing," Taylor (1995, p. 317), cites a number of studies which seriously challenge the assumption that learning is limited to rational processes. These studies suggest that intuition, empathy, spirituality, and affect contribute to the development of knowledge, and that excessive reliance on cognitive and rational elements hinders our understanding of how adults learn. Perhaps the most salient feature of this interpretation involves the willingness to accept the unconscious as having a legitimate role in explaining and determining behavior.

The second broad interpretation advocates an emphasis on the relationship between the individual and society, and the ways in which this relationship is both facilitated and inhibited. This position is usually referred to as transformation for critical social consciousness. Clark (1993) suggests the work of Mezirow, Freire, and Daloz, despite their differing conceptual positions, provides the framework from which this interpretation is drawn. Uniformly, these authors advocate the need for critical reflectivity as a means to gain rational clarity, which eventually leads to an understanding of how and why socially and personally imposed limitations hinder our ability to participate effectively in our respective worlds. It is further assumed that meaning is derived from the interpretation of experience, that this is a learning process, and that people display strong needs to understand their experiences. As Mezirow suggests, no "need is more fundamentally human than our need to understand the meaning of our experience" (1990, p. 11).

However, these interpretations are often cluttered with inconsistencies, erroneous assumptions, and fallacious reasonings which tend to limit our capacities for learning and growth. All of the above-mentioned authors express the need to become aware of these sets of "perceptual filters" in order to examine how we assign meaning and how we conduct ourselves in the world. The process which governs this examination is reflection, with the goal of transformation being the ability to understand preconceptions concerning judgments about ourselves, others, our social environment, and the concomitant relationships which occur between them. It is assumed that critical reflectivity leads to some form of action in which the individual strives to improve his or her life.

One of the clearest differences which separate these two interpretations is the importance assigned to the rational and cognitive realm, and the degree to which our knowledge structures are easily accessible in conscious states. The analytical depth position focuses on extra-rational images with which the ego or cognitive functions might engage. The orientation of Mezirow assumes that the ego or cognitive functions are distorted or outmoded, and require critical reflection for assimilation into the personality. Although neither position ignores the existence of the other, it is obvious the term 'transformation' construes two different orientations and processes, and implies something more than simple change.

It is the intent of this thesis to explore transformation through the conceptual framework based upon the Mezirowian interpretation. The following discussion continues under the relevant constellation of ideas, and includes a brief overview of Mezirow's theory, a discussion of the ongoing debate between Mezirow and his critics, a brief review of empirical research, a critique, and a section which locates the current research.

Overview of Mezirow's Theory

Although it is well beyond the goal of this literature review to present a detailed analysis of Mezirow's theory, it is important to understand the conceptual structure. Mezirow is essentially concerned with "meaning - how it is construed, validated, and reformulated - and the social conditions that influence the ways in which adults make meaning of their experience" (1991, p. xii). Coupling his own research with ideas from a variety of disciplines, Mezirow strings together a theory concerning how adults learn. He states: "Transformation theory is intended to be a comprehensive, idealized, and universal model consisting of the generic structures, elements, and processes of adult learning" (1994, p. 222). Within this context, the theoretical basis of Mezirow's theory is comprised of four essential ideas: meaning structures, transforming meaning structures, instrumental and communicative learning, and discourse (Mezirow, 1994).

Meaning Structures

Meaning structures refer to frames of reference from which we explicitly and implicitly construe meaning, and generally serve as distortive filters through which we interpret our experiences and eventually come to assign meaning. The filters are distortive to the extent that they lead "the learner to view reality in a way that arbitrarily limits what is included, impedes differentiation, lacks permeability or openness to other ways of seeing, or does not facilitate an integration of experience" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 118). Mezirow suggests these structures may be of two forms: meaning perspectives and meaning schemes.

Meaning perspectives refer to the "higher-order schemata, theories, propositions, beliefs, prototypes, goal orientations, and evaluations, and what linguists call 'networks of evaluations'" (1990, p. 2). They are developed through the assimilation of past experiences which emerge as "sets of habits of expectation.... which serve as selective codes governing perception and comprehension" (Mezirow, 1991; p. 37), and usually refer to issues such as beauty, love, justice, what is good, etc. Since these perspectives are often uncritically assimilated, they tend to distort how we interpret new experiences, assign meaning, and generally shape our perceptions, cognitions, and feelings. Mezirow posits three broad types of meaning perspectives, all of which are inter-related: epistemic, sociolinguistic, and psychological. Each of these may be affected by corresponding premise distortions which tend to limit the overall effectiveness and value of the perspective.

Epistemic premise distortions refer to the distorted assumptions about the nature and use of knowledge. Examples include the belief that propositions are meaningful only if they can be empirically verified, that events produced by social interaction are immutable (reification), and that descriptive concepts (e.g. stage theories) are prescriptive. Sociolinguistic premise distortions refer to the "mechanisms by which society and language arbitrarily shape and limit our perception and understanding, such as implicit ideologies; language games; cultural codes; social norms, roles, and practices; and underdeveloped levels of consciousness, as well as theories and philosophies" (1991, p. 130-131). Psychological premise distortions "produce ways of feeling and acting that cause us pain because they are inconsistent with our self-concept or sense of how we want to be as adults" (1990, p. 138). Examples include childhood traumas that continue into adulthood to create dysfunctional states.

Meaning schemes are much more specific, and thus subordinate meaning structures. They are defined as "sets of related and habitual expectations governing if-then, cause-effect, and category relationships as well as events" (Mezirow, 1990, p. 2). As such, the meaning scheme is more localized and more likely to influence our perceptions in concrete ways to the extent that they become "habitual, implicit rules for interpreting" (Mezirow, 1990, p. 2). Consequently, they typically receive more attention through reflection, and are thus more likely to undergo transformation. A clearer understanding of meaning schemes is possible through a contrast with meaning perspectives: "Meaning schemes serve as specific habits of expectation. Meaning perspectives are groups of related meaning schemes" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 35).

Transforming Meaning Structures

According to Mezirow, our meaning structures are "transformed through reflection, defined here as attending to the grounds (justification) for one's beliefs" (1994, p. 223). Mezirow (1981) initially identifies seven levels of reflection: reflectivity, affective reflectivity, discriminant reflectivity, judgmental reflectivity, conceptual reflectivity, psychic reflectivity, and theoretical reflectivity. However in 1991, he revises the list to include only content, process, and premise reflection. Meaning schemes are generally transformed through content and process reflection, and meaning perspectives are transformed through premise reflection. The role of reflection is addressed in greater detail later in this chapter. Either structure may be transformed as the result of minor accumulations of change, or large epochal shifts.

Through empirical study, Mezirow identifies 11 distinct phases of transformation which are not invariant, but generally follow a sequence:

1. A disorienting dilemma
2. Self examination with feelings of guilt or shame, sometimes turning to religion
3. A critical assessment of assumptions
4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and others have negotiated a similar change

5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
8. Provisionally trying out new roles
9. Renegotiating relationships and negotiating new relationships
10. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
11. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective (1994, p. 224)

This process results in four significant ways in which adults learn: elaborating or refining meaning schemes, forming new meaning schemes, transforming meaning schemes, or transforming meaning perspectives.

Instrumental and Communicative Learning

Mezirow draws heavily from the concepts of instrumental and communicative learning developed by Habermas to identify different situations under which learning occurs. Instrumental learning is concerned with manipulating the environment for the purpose of ascertaining truth through the use of hypothetical-deductive logic and objective measurement to investigate cause-effect relationships. The central assumption within this domain is that truth exists independent of our participation. Communicative learning is concerned with how we understand others, as well as how we are understood, within the relationships we have with others. It "often involves values, intentions, feelings, moral decisions, ideals and normative concepts"

(Mezirow, 1994; p. 225) for the purpose of establishing the validity of our assertions. This process of validation involves consensual agreement as the outcome of rational discourse. The central assumption of this domain is that knowledge is socially constructed through discourse by the respective participants.

The importance of instrumental and communicative learning to Mezirow's theory involves how we validate our learning experiences. Since each domain has its own set of logic and rules, it is critical that the correct applications are utilized. Without this validation process, we have no way to confirm that our learning is representative of something which is true, in either the objective or consensual sense.

Discourse

Mezirow defines discourse as "that special kind of dialogue in which we focus on content and attempt to justify beliefs by giving and defending reasons and by examining the evidence for and against competing viewpoints" (1994, p. 225). This is most applicable to the communicative learning domain, and is often ongoing as a process of continual re-evaluation. Again, Mezirow utilizes the theoretical framework of Habermas, and includes seven criteria which allow the conditions for ideal discourse to surface. All suggest that the participant have the necessary knowledge available, the skills to engage in dialogue, and the ability to be open and receptive to other points of view.

In summary, Mezirow's theory maintains that as humans, we possess internal cognitive structures which tend to categorize and code our experiences, including perceptions, feelings, and cognitions. These structures tend to distort our interpretations in manners which are often beyond our awareness. Through the use of reflection, we may come to identify these distortive elements, and thus "transform" our meaning structures. We tend to apply the meaning structures in either an instrumental or communicative domain, and test the validity of newly formed structures through the process of discourse.

Criticisms of Mezirow

Much of the criticism leveled at Mezirow is directed toward the theoretical aspects of his theory; in particular, to his extensive use of Habermasian ideas. Nonetheless, the criticism and Mezirow's responses spark a lively debate which spans several years. This section will briefly outline that debate, including a summary of Mezirow's responses to the respective authors.

Collard and Law (1989) present what Mezirow describes as "the first published critique of my ideas on this theme" (1989, p. 169). They suggest the essential problem with Mezirow's work concerns "the lack of a coherent, comprehensive theory of social change" (p. 102). They continue to suggest that excessive reliance on Habermasian ideas create the same problems for Mezirow as they do for Habermas: an unsubstantiated claim that knowledge is grounded in interest, a paradigmatic shift, and the difficulty in attaining the ideal conditions for discourse.

Collard and Law also accuse Mezirow of shifting between the theoretical frameworks of interactionism, existentialism, and critical theory, to the extent that "it is difficult to see how his ideas can be located within the European tradition of critical theory when they are largely devoid of the socio-political critique that lies at the heart of that tradition"(p. 105). In essence, the central point of this criticism is the emphasis on the individual which betrays affiliation to the social.

Hart (1990) continues the debate by also suggesting Mezirow misappropriates some of Habermas' terms. Her critique focuses on the issue of power, and states: "Because he does not place the issue of power and its relationships of dominance at the center of such a theory, Mezirow's treatment of the issue is uneven as well as somewhat non-committal" (p. 127). It is clear that Hart imparts a far better understanding of Habermas' writings than most, and generally develops these ideas to support her notion of emancipatory learning. For Hart, much of education reflects the set of tensions between the individual and the social, and between sets of structures created by society in which power always emerges as directing forces. Thus it is difficult for adult educators to step outside these boundaries, in the manner Mezirow suggests, to engage "in dominance-free forms of human interaction" (p. 136). The central point of this criticism is the failure to adequately address the issues of power and dominance within the proposed process of transformation.

In a somewhat different vein, Clark and Wilson (1991) acknowledge that previous criticisms of Mezirow have concentrated on the theoretical underpinnings, and make the attempt to view the theory "from within his own structure of perspective transformation" (p. 75). Citing Mezirow's dependency on "universal principles that apply across all contexts" (p. 76), they suggest that the importance of context in determining meaning is neglected. Clark and Wilson argue that Mezirow's tendency to cling to the concept of individual agency, and a sense of self as being unified and rational, severely limits the cogency of transformative learning: "Mezirow fails to adequately account for the formative role of the multiple contexts within which both the individual and his or her experience is situated and by which it is interpreted" (p. 80). Furthermore, the elements which tend to distort reality are the very ones which give it meaning; therefore, attempts to eliminate the distortive processes manifest as a denial of contextual influences. Clark and Wilson appeal to a sense of rationality which is less dependent on the forms of Habermas' "ideal discourse" and more dependent on the structures of anti-foundationalism, which stresses the idea that it is not possible to possess a point of view free from contextual influence. The essential point of this criticism is that Mezirow fails to consider the importance of context in determining meaning, and thus locks himself into a position of individualism common to the cultural and social milieu in which he operates.

Assuming a developmental psychology position, Mark Tennant (1993) takes a considerably different approach to Mezirow's transformative learning theory. He suggests "Mezirow does not sufficiently explore the social origins of the life course, which leads him to consider examples of what I would call 'normative' psychological development as instances of perspective transformation" (p. 34). Ironically, he initially offers a defense of Mezirow's position by challenging the previous criticisms of Collard and Law, Hart, and Clark and Wilson. Contrary to these previous criticisms, Tennant states that Mezirow "clearly recognizes the dialectical relationship between the individual and society" (p. 36), and that Mezirow's advocated interest in the social side of the individual does nothing to contradict or undermine the potency of the theory. Nonetheless, Tennant's concerns involve the distinctions between the normal social development processes of adults, and instances in which perspective transformations actually occur. Normal development is more similar to Mezirow's transformed meaning schemes, whereas perspective transformation involves a "developmental shift (a new world view) rather than simply developmental progress" (p. 41). Accordingly, "perspective transformation implies development [yet] the converse is not true" (p. 41). The basic problem is that failure to understand these differences may lead some to attribute outcomes to perspective transformation rather than the more appropriate normal expectations of social development. It appears that Tennant's essential concern pivots around Mezirow's failure to consider what is normal in terms of an adult's development, and how that might inadvertently be confused with perspective transformation.

Several other published articles and books examine and offer critique of Mezirow's writings, including Griffin (1988), Cunningham, (1992), and Newman (1993). Although each of these authors contributes to the ongoing debate, much of their discourse parallels the central themes and criticisms discussed above. Consequently, they will not be discussed individually here, but yet still serve to indicate the impact Mezirow has on the field of adult education (cf. Welton, 1993).

Mezirow's Responses

Much to Mezirow's credit, he graciously and responsibly offers a response to most of the published critiques. His general claim is that he is misunderstood and makes attempts to clarify the misunderstanding. Perhaps due to the seemingly widespread confusion, his responses tend to develop a pattern. He initially re-explains his position, then outlines the criticism, and continues with his attempt to identify the misunderstanding. It is clear that a sense of frustration begins to emerge by his response to Cunningham's book review: "It will be to our mutual interest and that of our profession if we attempt to abide by the canon of scholarly discourse by avoiding misrepresentation and by presenting alternative arguments when we disagree" (Mezirow, 1992; p. 252). Yet he never discourages critique, and continually asserts the value of "hearing from other colleagues about these or other ideas pertaining to transformative learning" (1989, p. 175).

Mezirow's response to Collard and Law (1989) includes the observation that "they are reading from a different meaning perspective" (p. 170), and suggests that not all adult education needs to focus on social action. As a result, their concerns fail to elucidate specific problems with the theory; instead, they focus on only one aspect. He clarifies his use of Habermas' three domains of learning (instrumental, dialogic, and emancipatory) by focusing on their obvious differences as they relate to learning rather than their ability to survive philosophical debate. In this sense, Mezirow attempts to extricate himself from criticisms and philosophical disagreement which are directed toward Habermas. He further indicates that he has made shifts concurrent with the shifts of Habermas, even though these shifts are not dependent on Habermas, and emphasizes that not all learning has social action as its ultimate goal.

Clark and Wilson's (1991) assertions that Mezirow fails to consider context, over-utilizes the notion of "ideal conditions," and attempts to remove the distortive processes which provide meaning receive from Mezirow the familiar: "I have failed to communicate to the extent that these able colleagues have seriously misinterpreted my meaning" (1991b, p. 190). He insists that context and culture are clearly evident in his writings, and that it "is precisely our cultural frames of reference and how we learn to change them that transformation theory addresses" (1991b, p. 190). The use of "ideal conditions of discourse" are defended as a means to establish some form of determining "what is true, truthful, authentic, and appropriate" (p. 191). In other words, Mezirow attempts to establish the criteria that we might use to validate and justify the content and outcomes of our discourse. By identifying those processes which tend to distort our interpretation of meaning, we can move closer to the ideal conditions; however, that does not mean that the cultural context has been abandoned since many of the distortions occur within, and as a result of, the cultural influences, not outside them. Mezirow's position concerning the use of the "ideal conditions of discourse" are clearly elucidated in the following quote:

> Ideals enable us to set standards against which to judge performance and to provide us with goals and a heuristic sense of direction. Acquiring critical judgment, involving rational discourse, appears to be related to education and aging. The assumptions of rational discourse are: (1) beliefs should contain no logical contradictions, (2) reasons for believing them can be advanced and assessed, (3) concepts will become more intelligible when analyzed and (4) we have criteria with which to know when the belief is justified or not. Even the most extreme post-modernist writers who argue that rationality and discourse is impossible and universal constructs are invalid, implicitly accept the universal 'rules'. (1993, p. 189)

In effect, Mezirow suggests much of what Clark and Wilson offer as criticism actually tends to support the basis of transformation theory.

Responding to Tennant's developmental position, Mezirow disagrees that "we gain insight by dichotomizing 'developmental shifts' and 'developmental' progress" (1994, p. 228). Instead, it is of more value to consider the developmental process as being inclusive of the transformation of meaning schemes and perspectives. In this sense, the "process by which adults learn - through the elaboration, acquisition, and transformation of meaning schemes and perspectives - is the same as the process of adult development" (Mezirow, 1994, p. 228). Furthermore, it is quite possible to "develop" by simply becoming assimilated into normative developmental activities, such as leaving home, attending university, or procreating, without examining our premises. Mezirow also disagrees with Tennant's assertion that "broad social critiques" are absolutely necessary for perspective transformation by citing the possibility of transforming through reflection on psychological and epistemic codes. In these situations, the social critique plays a subordinate role to the awareness of the context which is guiding the interpretations.

In summary, it is clear that Mezirow recognizes the possibility of his earlier works being somewhat unclear. His continued efforts to indicate the misunderstandings and to elaborate his position tend to strengthen the utility and validity of his theory. Although some published articles have been omitted from this review of Mezirow's responses (e.g. Mezirow, 1994, 1992), the central aspects of the debate are captured above.

Empirical Support

Interest in Mezirow's conception of perspective transformation has generated numerous empirical research endeavors; however, "there has been a paucity of publications and little discussion about empirical explorations of transformative learning theory or related premises" (Taylor, 1995, p. 313). Much of the research has been conducted as Master's theses, doctoral dissertations, and often is formally presented only as part of limited conference proceedings. As a result, much of this research remains isolated and highly inaccessible to a large portion of the field. Indeed, Taylor's (1995) literature review of relevant studies indicates less than ten percent of the 27 identified in the review are published in journal format. Taylor's efforts represent the most comprehensive analysis of empirical studies which examine Mezirow's theory, or parts thereof, to date. The following discussion is simply a summarization of his concentrated efforts.

Taylor identifies a number of purposes to which the studies are directed, including: social and community transformation; a model to explain cultural learning; transformation as learning in group therapy; specific components of the transformative process; transformative learning as lifestyle and career changes; transformative learning in educational contexts; and transformative learning in relation to withdrawal experiences. Most of these studies employed naturalistic research designs, which included semi-structured interviews, collaborative methods, ethnographic methods, anthropological methods, content analysis, and some mixed designs using quantitative methods. He clusters the results around five common themes relating to transformative learning: "disorienting dilemma, context, critical reflection, other ways of knowing, and a perspective transformation" (p. 313). Several of these studies address more than one theme.

Four studies address the disorienting dilemma. While each study confirms the presence and importance of this initial phase, some questions emerge as to its purpose, its manifestation as external or internal, and why some dilemmas induce transformation and others do not. Furthermore, it may not be the initial phase since historical and social factors appear to play a role.

Nine studies address the role of context. All of these studies generally agree that context, socio-cultural, and personal factors are important considerations in the transformative process. However, many of the relationships between these factors remain unclear, and their impact on the transformative process requires more research. Some of these questions might examine whether or not these influences can be overcome, the predictability of transformative learning based on personal and social factors, and the relationship between similarity of backgrounds and patterns of transformation.

Nine studies address critical reflection. Some of these studies agree with Mezirow's suggestion that critical reflection is of great importance to the transformative process; others suggest that critical reflection is over-emphasized or that transformation can occur without critical reflection. It remains unclear as to when and where in the transformative process critical reflection is essential, or how it is that meaning structures can change without the aid of critical reflection.

Fourteen studies address other ways of knowing. All of these studies submit that Mezirow's reliance on rationality severely limits our understanding of transformation, and argue that intuition, affective learning, guidance through feelings, "whole person learning," and learning through relationships are of major importance to transformative learning. Although these studies illuminate the importance of social relationships to the process of transformation, it is not clear why some relationships are more beneficial than others, nor do we yet understand the degree of inter-relatedness between transformation, relationships, and critical reflection.

Seventeen studies address perspective transformation. Six of these studies concur with Mezirow's linear and step-wise process, while five indicate "a recursive, evolving, and spiraling process" (Taylor, 1995, p. 317). Others indicate that transformation goes beyond an alteration of perspectives to include a sense of increased power, spiritual growth, compassion for and connection with others, and development within the transpersonal realm. Three studies even identify regression and flashbacks after the transformative experience. There remains confusion surrounding what exactly constitutes a perspective transformation, as well as a gauge to indicate how much change is required to qualify the experience as perspective transformation. Taylor also suggests the need for longitudinal methodologies which are less reliant on the retrospection of participants, and thus possess the ability to actually track the changes as part of the research.

Taylor's review is a valuable contribution to transformative theory. Not only does it result in a compendium of empirical research concerning the theory, but it also emphasizes the necessity for further research. It is apparent from the diversity of the above mentioned studies that a clear understanding of how and why people undergo transformation eludes us. It is equally apparent that many of the studies cross boundaries between the previously discussed "two broad interpretations" of transformation. This may well indicate the futility of attempts to isolate notions of transformation as being specifically rational, cognitive, and social, or an exploration of intra-psychic figures, structures, and dialogues. On the other hand, if we are to view transformation as being valuable to adult education, it is important to continue researching specific elements of the implied process to gain clarification.

Critique

From the above discussion, it is clear that conceptual agreements with Mezirow's ideas are not unilateral, nor does the empirical research to date provide a clear framework to account adequately for the process of transformation. Although no theory satisfies all the conditions and constraints of those who choose to employ the respective constructs, transformation theory seems to attract more confusion than is necessary. Also consistent with most theories, many of the subtle contributions of transformation theory are not immediately recognizable. In this case, one of these subtle contributions involves the introduction of ideas originating from the social cognition literature. This implies a need to explore critically the sense of confusion surrounding Mezirow's ideas, and to offer discussion concerning the advantages of introducing ideas from the social cognition literature into transformation theory.

Examining the Confusion

In a field which typically denounces the "liberating power of theoretical practice" (Welton, 1987, p. 49), theoretical structure provides some sense of order to an otherwise chaotic collection of individual premises and practices (cf. Gergen, 1994; Mezirow, 1991; Shotter 1981). Nonetheless, the theory seems to generate more confusion than clarity. This confusion may spring from three identifiable sources: (1) adult education's seeming reluctance to address and incorporate theoretical and conceptual issues; (2) the lack of clarity evidenced in Mezirow's earlier publications; (3) misunderstandings of Mezirow's basic ideas. It is this last account of confusion that this critique will attempt to explore.

Tennant (1993) captures this general milieu by asking "what is it about Mezirow's theory which promotes such divergent interpretations?" (p. 36). Disentangling the confusion surrounding the varying interpretations of Mezirow's theory is a difficult task; however, much of this confusion can be traced to simple misinterpretation and failure to take into consideration the theory as a whole. A common thread throughout much of the discussion around Mezirow involves the pervasive tendency to decompose the theory and isolate Mezirow in one position or another. Mezirow's interpretation of transformation is best understood as representing a set of ideas linked together and dependent on each other rather than a collection of independent ideas, each standing on its own merit. To this purpose, it is imperative to realize that his theory is a theory concerning how adults learn through the interpretation of meaning. The resulting constellation of ideas seem to cut across boundaries previously held to be impermeable, and to this extent they become inclusive and universal. It is not a theory about social change, nor of power relationships, nor of adult development. That all of these may be included under the umbrella of transformation theory offers some impetus in understanding how and why so much confusion arises. An examination of the two most repeated criticisms may shed some light as to why the confusion appears to be so pervasive. Specifically, they are the suggestions that Mezirow fails to allow for social critique and that he over-emphasizes the individual aspects of learning.

The first general line of criticism involves the failure to adequately account for how social critique might emerge as a result of the transformation of meaning structures. A number of critics assert that Mezirow fails to develop his theory such that he may be firmly situated within the critical social paradigm (Collard and Law, 1989), that he fails to provide for cultural context (Clark and Wilson, 1991), and that he fails to adequately account for the possibility of social action (Hart, 1990; Neuman, 1993). The central theme which connects all of these criticisms is the attack on Mezirow's epistemological stance. More specifically, these authors seem to be concerned with Mezirow's failure to firmly anchor himself within the critical social theory paradigm of the Frankfurt School despite his appropriation of many of their ideas. It is the contention of this critique that these authors simply misinterpret Mezirow's ultimate goals by attempting to force his position into one epistemological stance or another. Although Mezirow's earlier writings did not clearly indicate his stance, by 1991 he states his position about how we should interpret his theory about transformation:

> Transformation theory does not derive from a systematic extension of an existing intellectual theory or tradition such as behaviorism, neo-Marxism, positivism, or psychological humanism.... I would like the ideas presented here to be understood in relationship to one another and to our common experience

> rather than assessed for their fidelity to a particular intellectual tradition, theory, or discipline. (1991, p. xiv-xv)

It is clear that Mezirow attempts to refine his position regarding his epistemological stance, and consequently addresses some of the earlier criticisms of his work.

It is evident that Mezirow's goal is not adherence to the limitations of a particular stance or paradigm, but rather an attempt to cross boundaries and utilize ideas from more than one position. The use of ideas originating within cognitive psychology draws heavily from the positivist and post-positivist camps, and the use of Habermasian ideas draws heavily from the critical social theory camp. Continuing with this line of reasoning, it is evident that Mezirow cannot, nor should not, be epistemologically isolated. Thus, some of the confusion may be attributed to interpretations which attempt to position Mezirow in one camp or the other. These interpretations often emerge as specific preferences or biases of the respective author, and are subsequently supported through the construction of arguments which attack the lack of adherence to a respective camp. This is certainly not to suggest that different interpretations are not possible, or even commendable, but rather that the interpretation must take into accurate account the very position which is being interpreted. In this situation, it is of little value to isolate Mezirow when it is clear he is not writing from one specific isolated paradigm.

The second line of general criticism involves the idea that Mezirow overemphasizes the individual aspects of learning at the expense of ignoring social collectives. As Tennant (1993) notes, "Mezirow's theory has been criticised for lacking a social critique, overemphasising personal transformation, and balking at the notion of collective social action" (p. 35-36). Again, it is the contention of this critique that this line of criticism reflects a basic misunderstanding of Mezirow. A theory based upon how adults learn through the construal of meaning implies two basic premises: one which involves the individual nature of learning, and the other which involves the social influences of making meaning. Much of the confusion seems to stem from the propensity of adult educators to tangle the positions.

The first premise involves the notion of learning. Although a large number of definitions exist, most concur with Boud, Keogh, and Walker's (1985) suggestion that "only learners themselves can learn and only they can reflect on their own experiences" (p. 11). The essential point here is that the act of learning is very individual; to assume otherwise is to suggest that someone else does the learning for us. Such a supposition does not merit refutation. For example, in a group situation, the social influence of the context is evident, but it is the individual in the group which represents the fundamental unit that learns. In this line of reasoning, it becomes impossible to remove the individual from the act of learning; consequently, it is rather difficult to overemphasize its personal nature.

The second premise involves the nature of how we come to construe meaning. Ross and Nisbett (1991) define construal as "the manner in which the person understands the situation as a whole" (p. 11). They further posit that there is an inherent subjective quality to this construal, that people often fail to recognize that it involves a constructive process, that it involves degrees of variability, and that causal attributions often fail to account for individual dispositions. Mezirow (1991) suggests construing meaning involves two major processes: scanning and construal. Scanning refers to "exploring, differentiating, recognizing, feeling, intuiting, and imagining" (p. 24). Construal may be presentational, which is prelinguistic, central to perception, and essentially interprets cues detected through the senses; or, it may be propositional, which is linguistic, central to cognition, and monitors presentational construal through the use of "rational and reflective interpretations" (p. 24). Furthermore, there is a strong sense of inter-dependence between the two forms of construal such that meaning is made both perceptually and cognitively.

It is obvious that construal is indeed an individual process, but it certainly does not occur without external and social influences. Mezirow defines learning as "the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide further action" (1991, p. 12). The essential point here is that the prior interpretations have been, and may continue to be, shaped by the same influences which tended to distort epistemic, sociolinguistic, and psychological meaning perspectives. To this extent, Mezirow expends a great deal of effort to indicate how social influences effect the process of learning. Confusion seems to arise when the cognitive and rational nature of his ideas are separated from the context of the theory as a whole such that the social nature of learning becomes secondary.

It is the suggestion of this critique that one way to avoid the confusion discussed above may be to view Mezirow's theory through the metaphor of a bridge. The purpose of a bridge is to connect two previously isolated areas in a manner such that each side has easier access to the other. That some bridges are more sturdy than others is self evident; yet, it is equally evident that the most sturdy bridges are those which receive the largest amount of attention concerning their development. Relative to adult education, the bridge of transformation theory is in its infancy. Nonetheless, the metaphor provides a means to understand Mezirow without the afflicting confusion. To illustrate the metaphor, I will return to the two general lines of criticism discussed above.

Epistemologically, Mezirow's ideas can be viewed as a bridge between the positivist camps, represented through the use of cognitive psychology, and the critical social theory camp, an emancipatory camp represented through the use of Habermas. The bridge allows Mezirow, indeed all of us, to ambulate between camps in an attempt to build some sense of community, and ultimately utilize pertinent ideas from both sides. In essence, the appropriation of concepts from both camps allows for a more inclusive understanding of transformation theory, and offers the potential challenge to become "critically reflective" about our own assumptions. Attempts to dislocate the bridge may be represented as attempts to undermine the very anchors of each side. More specifically, if we understand Mezirow's theory through the bridge metaphor, then we become less prone to the act of isolation. The result is a clearer understanding of transformation theory which corresponds to a reduction in the degree of confusion by providing an encompassing framework through which to view and understand the ideas.

Furthermore, Mezirow's work may be viewed as a bridge between the individual and the social. As indicated earlier, his central concerns relate to the construal of meaning, and how the epistemic, socio-linguistic, and psychological perspectives are inter-related. However, he never suggests that premise reflection cannot occur within a single perspective, independent from the influence of the others; quite simply, he allows for the possibility that both might occur. By doing so, Mezirow spans the individual and the social aspects of learning. Tennant's (1993) statement approximates this notion:

> A key, perhaps, is that his theory is directed at the *intersection* of the individual and the social. His concern is with the social within the individual, especially its capacity to generate dysfunctional meaning perspectives which distort or limit our understanding of experience. In this sense, Mezirow certainly does *not* assume a unified rational self.... In addition, Mezirow clearly recognizes the dialectical relationship between the individual and society. (p. 36; italics in original)

Contributions of the Social Cognition Literature

One of the unidentified contributions of Mezirow is his utilization of several bodies of literature originating in the field of social psychology. Citing the work of Nisbett and Ross (1980) involving inferential errors and heuristics, Kelly's (1963) discussion of personal constructs, Langer's (1989) discussion of mindfulness, and Fiske and Taylor's (1984) compendium of social cognition research, Mezirow taps into a rich source of information which seems to elude much of adult education. Both social psychology and Mezirow share similar ideas in that they are concerned with how the individual interprets the environment and comes to attribute meaning. Somewhat ironically, both are recipients of similar forms of criticism. For example, Gergen (1978, 1994), Harre & Secord (1972), and Shotter (1981, 1993) all attack social psychology's propensity to remain rooted within the positivist paradigm despite full acknowledgment that it is people's interpretations which tend to provide individual meaning. The essential differences between social psychology and Mezirow pertains to the philosophical stances: social cognition traditionally understands interpretation to be a *misinterpretation* of an objective reality whereas Mezirow, through the use of critical social theory, understands interpretation as having the potential to be *constituent* of reality. The basic similarity, and thus the advantage accessing the social cognition literature, is that both Mezirow's theory about transformation and social cognition may be viewed as the pivotal points, or the "bridge" between the individual and the social.

Despite continued reliance on the quantitative methods of investigation, many of the theories and ideas represented in the social cognition literature provide compelling support for transformation theory. However, Mezirow ignores, deliberately or otherwise, concrete and tenable ideas which might enhance his position. For example, theoretical models which attempt to explain how schemas associated with stereotyping change closely parallel Mezirow's account of meaning scheme transformation. Rothbart (1981) advances two models: the "bookkeeping" model and the "conversion" model. According to the bookkeeping model, people monitor the number of confirmatory and disconfirmatory instances relative to a particular schema. Changes to the schema might occur as the "slow accrual of (roughly) equally weighted disconfirming instances [which] can overwhelm the confirming instances and lead to a repudiation of the belief" (p. 176). In effect, this model proposes a gradual change of the schema through the additive influence of each of the disconfirmatory instances. According to the conversion model, the change is more catastrophic than gradual, and requires a minimal number of highly salient and critical disconfirmatory instances to alter the schema. A third model, termed "subtyping" is generally accredited to Brewer, Dull, and Lui (1981), and Taylor (1981). According to this model, a superordinate schema is confronted with disconfirmatory instances which create various subtypes, or subordinate schemas, to account for the disconfirming instances. The change occurs as the result of the schema branching out and becoming less dependent on the superordinate structure, and more dependent on the small subtypes. As a result, the schema tolerates exceptions even though the superordinate category may not change radically. It is clear that these three models are similar in nature to Mezirow's explanation of how meaning schemes transform; yet at the same time, it is puzzling why Mezirow fails to include these sources.

Mezirow also fails to take into consideration a number of cognitive biases which tend to shape our "habits of expectation." Although he considers heuristics which are rapid forms of reasoning, errors in inferential logic and a number of cognitive biases (eg: Nisbett & Ross, 1980), Mezirow omits a number of biases that might generate support for his position. Fiske and Taylor (1984) provide extensive discussion concerning the numerous ways in which we typically tend to distort information, and suggest that sampling information, under-utilization of base rate information, a lack of statistical understanding, the dilution effect, how we integrate information, assessments of covariation, illusory correlation, the under-utilization of consensus information, and self-serving attributional biases all contribute to explaining the social perceiver's conception of reality. Although it is not important to explain each of these ideas in detail, it is important to realize that each may play a role in the development and maintenance of our "perceptual filters" and "habits of expectations." It is to this extent that the value of accessing the social cognition literature becomes apparent: understanding the variant ways in which we interpret our environments provides insight into how change, or transformation, might occur.

Despite the cognitive and rational emphasis of the social cognition literature, there exist obvious relationships with the efforts of Mezirow. One of the central linking tendencies is the concern with how and why interpretation is so fundamental to the attribution of meaning. Accordingly, a body of literature which clearly addresses the individual within the social provides not only Mezirow, but much of adult education, with insights as to how and why people might behave in certain situations. Key premises of adult education include learner expectations, learner characteristics, and the social nature of the learning environment (eg: Brookfield, 1986), and key premises of Mezirow's transformation theory include the notion that people participate in creating knowledge, and the importance of interpretation in the process of learning. The social cognition literature has potential to embellish both. This is not to suggest that social cognition is without its just criticisms, but rather that certain ideas possess merit in assisting adult education to understand how adults learn, and perhaps more importantly, those situations in which they do not learn. In this sense, Mezirow provides the field with a welcome addition to possible theoretical resources from which it may extract relevant ideas, and further addresses the need for adult education to become more permeable with respect to adopting theoretical constructs from other disciplines (cf. Brookfield, 1995).

Locating the Current Research

As indicated earlier, the dynamic which fuels the Mezirowian interpretation of transformation is the process of reflection. The term *reflection* appears to pervade the adult education literature to such an extent that it manifests as one of the central premises of the field, and often is cited as the distinct difference between education for adults and education for children (eg: Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Brookfield, 1986, 1995; Mezirow, 1991, 1981). Despite the large amount of adult education literature which addresses reflection in some form or another, the outcomes fail to present it as a cohesive and invariant process. Although it is often understood to include elements of being "active, deliberate, conscious, internal, dialectical and goal directed" (Andrusyszyn and Davie, 1995, p. 1), the process of reflection certainly implies something more than simply engaging in an internal and cognitive activity which takes stock of some activity, event, person, or affect. Consequently, it is of some value to explore the process of reflection, both from a conceptual and research framework.

Newman (1994) articulates the apparent change in the meaning we assign to reflection. Over the past twenty-five years, reflection as a process has been alternatively equated with the simple act of pondering, as suggested by the liberal educationists; an emotionally charged state of self-disclosure, as suggested by the work of Carl Rodgers; a politicized version in which reflection and action can no longer be separated, as suggested by the work of Freire; a stage version which separates reflection and action to be different concepts, as suggested by the work of Donald Schon; a chronological model which further separates reflection from action, as suggested by the work of Boud, Keogh, and Walker; a subsequent re-interpretation by Boud, Keogh, and Walker which addresses the role reflection plays prior to an experience; an attempt to cement reflection with reasoning, as suggested by the work of Peter Jarvis; and finally, a re-integration of reflection and action, as suggested by the work of Mezirow. The key concept which tends to discriminate these interpretations from those of Mezirow involves the tendency to isolate reflection from action, and in some cases to isolate reflection from affect. As Newman aptly points out:

> Mezirow's perspective transformation contains within it a form of reflection that is of another order altogether. Perspective transformation involves achieving a form of meta-reflection in which, if successful, we not only see the

> world and ourselves more clearly, we *see ourselves seeing the world.* We perceive our perceptions. We are aware of awareness. (p. 239; italics in original)

Newman continues to suggest that Mezirow "recontextualizes" reflection through the inclusion of cultural assumptions which contribute to the formation of meaning perspectives, and the subsequent examination of these particular sets of assumptions. The essential point here is that critically reflecting upon assumptions which are products of our culture includes considerations of how we interact within the culture; therefore, the process becomes more social than individual and forces us to locate ourselves within the context of our culture. This represents a discernible difference between viewing reflection as an activity which employs only higher order cognitions and one which creates the potential to include social and emotional components.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Mezirow (1981, p. 12-13) originally posits seven different levels of reflection organized into two broad categories which represent the basic differences between reflection and critical reflection. Reflection "is understood as an assessment of how or why we have perceived..." (1990, p. 6), whereas critical reflection "looks back on prior learning, may focus on assumptions about the content of the problem, the process or procedures followed in problem solving, or the presupposition on the basis of which the problem has been posed" (1990, p. 6). By 1991 Mezirow refines his discussion of reflection by coupling it with problem solving and problem posing. Within this context, three distinct forms of reflection emerge: reflection on content, process, and premise. Content reflection involves "reflection on *what* we think, perceive, feel, or act upon" (p. 107). Process reflection is "an examination of *how* we perform these functions of perceiving, thinking, feeling, or acting and an assessment of our efficacy in performing them" (p. 108). Content and process reflection may lead to simple confirmations of meaning schemes, or they may lead to a transformation of the meaning scheme. Typically, they are associated but not necessarily limited to instrumental learning.

Premise reflection is of a much different nature, and thus deserves greater attention. It is within this form of reflection that the *whys* of thinking, feeling, perceiving, and acting are addressed. Thus it is with premise reflection that we become aware of the epistemic, socio-linguistic, and psychological distortions which tend to shape how we come to understand meaning. The logic involved with this form of reflection is also different. Mezirow terms this "dialectic-presuppositional," and it is characterized by an inferential process based on what we know about our own knowledge structures. This is in contrast to the more familiar inductive and deductive logic processes which accompany content and process reflection. For Mezirow, premise reflection constitutes a deeper, more difficult, and ultimately more profound activity that often requires social dialogue or discourse to become recognized. Consequently, it is only through premise reflection that meaning perspectives may be transformed. In this context, premise reflection becomes synonymous with critical reflection.

Mezirow also associates reflection with action. Nonreflective action may be habitual, thoughtful, or introspective, but only requires reflection when some experience cannot be assimilated into existing meaning structures. On most occasions, nonreflective action stays within the instrumental learning realm. Reflective action involves action that is predicated on the outcomes of the reflective process, and can be either instrumental or communicative. Kemmis (1985) also echoes the relationship between reflection and action, and considers it to be dialectical in nature: "Reflection is a dialectical process: it looks inward at our thoughts and thought processes, and outward at the situation in which we find ourselves...." (p. 141). Kemmis continues to suggest that reflection is not simply an internal process, but rather a social process; that reflection is shaped by some form of ideology; and that research which investigates reflection must take into consideration the dialectical relationship.

In essence, both Mezirow and Kemmis distinguish between simple cognition which typically occurs within pre-existing meaning structures, and reflection which typically challenges the pre-existing meaning structures by asking the "how and what" questions. It becomes critical reflection when we pose the "why" questions. Attaching action to reflection provides a means to engage in the "validity testing" of our newly formed meaning structures, and tends to locate the reflective process within a problem solving or problem posing context. It is in this sense that Mezirow differs from a number of other theorists who posit accounts of adult learning.

Most of the literature addresses reflection and critical reflection from conceptual frameworks. Despite the obvious importance, few empirical studies actually focus on the processes of reflection as the primary interest. As empirical support, Mezirow cites Ellen Langer's (1989) work involving mindfulness, and Schon's (1983) work involving the concept of "reflection in action," yet neither of these authors specifically address reflection as it pertains to transformation. Of the nine studies Taylor (1995) identifies in his review which dealt with reflection, none specifically investigated the various forms of reflection as outlined by Mezirow, although several indicated the importance of critical reflection to the transformative experience (eg: Taylor, 1994; Sveinunggaard, 1993). The various authors in Boud, Keogh, and Walker's (1985) edited book all implement reflection into their various educational practices, but usually view it as being one component in the learning process. A variety of other empirical studies emerge from educators' attempts to utilize reflection as part of the learning experience, but fail to actually investigate how the reflective process unfolds; by doing so, they tend to perpetuate Candy's (1991) assertion that adult education lacks empirical research which represents the perspective of the student. In conclusion, there appears to be a paucity of empirical research which clearly focuses on reflection as the primary interest despite numerous acknowledgments by key writers in the field concerning the need to do so (eg: Brookfield 1994, 1995; Garrison, 1992; Mezirow, 1991, 1996). The present thesis directs itself to this goal.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The methodology in this research follows a combination of phenomenology and hermeneutics, and closely aligns with Max Van Manen's (1990) interpretation. Although it is well beyond the intent of this thesis to present detailed explanations of either phenomenology or hermeneutics, it allots some discussion to indicate a general understanding of the main issues. Accordingly, this chapter is presented in two distinct sections: a philosophical section, which briefly outlines the historical and philosophical roots of phenomenology and hermeneutics; and a methods section, which outlines what is actually done in this research.

Philosophical Roots

In the introduction, I suggest it is important for researchers to locate themselves in relation to the methodology. Part of this orientation process requires the researcher to become familiar with the basic fundamentals of the selected methodology, and to understand the methods used within that methodology. This idea is echoed by Van Manen (1990):

> Hermeneutics and phenomenology are human science approaches which are rooted in philosophy; they are philosophies, reflective disciplines. Therefore, it is important for the human science researcher in education to know something of the philosophical traditions. This does not mean, however, that one must become a professional philosopher in an academic sense. It means that one

> should know enough to be able to articulate the epistemological or theoretical implications of doing phenomenology and hermeneutics… (p.7-8)

However, both Patton (1990) and Spiegelberg (1982) suggest that phenomenology as a philosophical approach and phenomenology as a research method should not be viewed as the same thing. As a philosophical approach, phenomenology possesses the capacity to encapsulate many qualitative methodologies. However, when using phenomenology as a method, a number of dimensions differentiate it from other methods. Patton suggests that:

> conducting a study with a phenomenological focus (i.e., getting at the essence of the experience of some phenomenon) is different from using phenomenology to philosophically justify methods of qualitative inquiry as legitimate in social science research….One can employ a general phenomenological perspective to elucidate the importance of using methods that capture people's experience of the world without conducting a phenomenological study that focuses on the essence of shared experience…" (p. 71)

For the purposes of this research, the term phenomenology refers to method as opposed to philosophical perspective. Nonetheless, it is still important to have a general understanding of phenomenology as a philosophical perspective.

Phenomenology as Philosophical Perspective

Phenomenology as a philosophical perspective arose as a protest against the reductionist methods of analytical western philosophy. Phenomenology generally refers to the distinction Kant introduced between the phenomenon and the noumenon. Phenomenon relates to the *appearance* of reality in awareness, whereas noumenon relates to reality as it *actually* exists (Titus, Smith, & Nolan, 1979). However, phenomenology did not gain popularity until the early twentieth century when Husserl released his manifesto entitled *Philosophy as a Rigorous Science* in which the term "To the things themselves" attempted to reclaim the essence of experience as an important part of understanding. Husserl's basic premise emphasized the necessity to distinguish between the physical world known to science, and the world in which we live. He was most concerned with things relating to the human condition, and maintained that "we can only know what we experience by attending to perceptions and meanings that awaken our conscious awareness" (Patton, 1990; p. 69). This might be achieved by the stripping away of images and experiences until the "root essence" is all that remains. It is through these "essences" that we come to understand the real meaning of any given phenomenon; furthermore, these essences tend to be shared among all people. For example, Van Manen (1990) develops his book through the essence of pedagogy, or more simply, what it means to be a teacher. Although they may differ, each of us has thoughts about what it means to be a teacher; thus, stripping away the differences allows a clearer understanding of the "essence" of being a teacher. From a philosophical standpoint, Husserl provided the impetus for many disciplines to dislodge from the positivist grip of studying human behavior through traditional, or reductionist, techniques. Quite simply, his philosophy provided the means to study the human condition by using the human condition.

A number of others made significant contributions to the phenomenological perspective, although each of them expanded and re-interpreted the basic notion that the perceptual appearance, or interpretation, of things played an important role in understanding. Martin Heidegger studied under Husserl, and used phenomenology to study the existence of man, and the essence of "being." Maurice Merleau-Ponty proposed that phenomenology must contain a dialectic component, and believed phenomenology was most concerned with a world in process, which means it must be viewed as continuous (Titus, Smith, & Nolan, 1979). Numerous other philosophers made contributions (cf. Spiegelberg, 1982), but the major point here is that phenomenology has influenced a broad spectrum of disciplines and provided a major thrust for the acceptance of qualitative research as a legitimate form of inquiry.

Phenomenology as Method

As a method, phenomenology remains true to Husserl's term "to the things themselves" and is most suited to research which attempts to understand the essence of people's shared experiences. The numerous adaptations of multiple disciplines contribute a constellation of terms: dialogal phenomenology, ecological phenomenology, empirical phenomenology, imaginal phenomenology represent but a few (eg: Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Barrell, Aantoos, Richards, & Arons, 1987). Despite this plethora of terminology, Spiegelberg (1982) suggests that seven key elements establish the framework for using phenomenology as a method:

1. investigating particular phenomena;
2. investigating general essences;
3. apprehending essential relationships among essences;
4. watching modes of appearing;
5. watching the constitution of phenomena in consciousness;
6. suspending belief in the existence of the phenomena;
7. interpreting the meaning of the phenomena. (p. 682)

However, Spiegelberg also indicates that not all those who align themselves with the phenomenological method accept or practice all of the steps. Focus on the first three steps seem common to all methods rooted in phenomenology, whereas the various branches of phenomenology tend to focus on one or more of the remaining four steps in addition to the first three steps. The available literature which addresses phenomenology as method is massive, and well beyond the present scope to explore fully. The key point here is that phenomenological research must address, at the minimum, the following points:

1. it requires the researcher to have some personal experience with the phenomena

2. it examines those experiences which may be common to all people, and thus shared, and attempts to bring into view the essence of the phenomena to promote an enriched understanding
3. it concerns itself more with intuitive interpretation rather than hypothetical explanation which typically unfolds as a descriptive process
4. the research unfolds as an investigation into questions which follow the basic pattern of "what is the meaning of..." or "what is the experience of..." (Van Manen, 1990)

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics may be best described as a narrowing down, or "funneling," both as philosophical perspective and method. To this extent, it does not suffer from the same ambiguities which permeate phenomenology; thus, the hermeneutic philosophy and the hermeneutic method are more closely aligned. Most historical sources accredit Gadamer and Ricoeur as being the major proponents of the movement (eg., Spiegelberg, 1982; Barrell et al., 1987).

Very briefly, Gadamer focused on what Spiegelberg referred to as the seventh basic method of phenomenology: interpreting the meaning of the phenomena. He believed that it is not possible to isolate ourselves independently from the meaning of textual relations. In this sense, textual refers not to the written word but rather to any set of underlying structures which may guide our understanding of meanings. Gadamer advocated the need for "interpretative dialogue" in which cultural and symbolic interpretations must be considered. Under this light, understanding becomes contextual and thus situationally determined. Only when we begin to peel back the layers of the "text" through interpretation can we come to have a full understanding of the essence of the phenomena. This "peeling back" process allows for the potential to establish connections between seemingly unconnected situations, events, and understandings. The key point here is to realize that Gadamer suggested we cannot separate ourselves as researchers from the meaning of the situation; thus, our interpretation plays a major role in understanding.

Ricoeur viewed textuality as referring to any human condition. His greatest emphasis was placed on the use of language, in which he suggested that single words often have overlapping meanings (eg,. Barrell et al., 1987). In order to understand the overlapping meanings, it is necessary to look for the governing metaphor common to all meanings through "metaphorical reflection." Again, this leads to the comprehension of the essence of meaning. Ricoeur was also interested in establishing a firm "methodological relationship between explanation and understanding…" (Van Manen, p. 180) which indicates his basic difference from Gadamer. Gadamer was more concerned with the idea that understanding could become an actual "mode of being," whereas Ricouer was concerned with linking the "mode of being" back to methodological terms. As such, he attempted to generate a strand of hermeneutics that reflected a return to the rigors of scientific research. These rigors were not predicated on positivist assumptions, but rather on the assumptions offered by phenomenology.

Hermeneutics as a method emphasizes the intuitive processes of "peeling back" the layers of understand through metaphorical interpretation of connections between things. This generally involves the use of the "hermeneutic circle" which Barrell et al. (1987) describe as "that process that proceeds through multidimensional significance, differentiation, dialectics, and intuitive understanding in order to arrive at a position whereby one 'returns' and now views the original starting point…from a new and larger perspective" (p. 436). The goal here is to grasp meaning from as many angles as possible; consequently, it expands the phenomenological notion that phenomena can be studied only from an experiential point of view.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Due to the very natures of phenomenology and hermeneutics, there are an infinite number of ways in which the two might be combined. The final outcome of combinations is mostly determined through the researcher, and his or her "interpretation" of the perspectives and methods. However, as researchers, we cannot simply invent our own methods: we need some framework which will posit the research as a legitimate inquiry. This framework provides a set of "rules" which tend to distinguish legitimate forms of research from those that are suspect in terms of rigor and trustworthiness (eg., Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Patton, 1990). To this purpose, my research closely parallels Van Manen's interpretation of hermeneutic phenomenology. The basics of this include:

1. a combination of descriptive (phenomenological) and interpretive (hermeneutic) methods
2. using personal experience as the starting point
3. obtaining experiential description from others (interviewing)
4. interpreting and writing (continuous in that qualitative research is never completed or finished)
5. engaging in hermeneutic phenomenological reflection (ongoing)

Methods Section

This section describes the exact methods used to conduct and interpret the research. Prior to starting the process, the researcher met with his supervisor several times to discuss and clarify the research direction. One meeting included all members of the committee, which provided the researcher with further clarification concerning the purpose of the research, participant selection, and an alternative means to investigate reflection.

Participant Recruitment

The goal of the participant recruitment process was to seek participants who had the potential to provide rich information and experiences relating to transformation and reflection. Patton (1990) refers to this as purposeful sampling, whereby the participants supply cases from which "one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term *purposeful* sampling" (p.169, italics in original).

The "purposeful" participants in this study were all members of the university community. Each of the participants felt they had undergone a transformative experience. In order to attract these participants, the following techniques were used:

1. Posters which briefly indicated the nature of the research, time commitments involved, and the researcher's phone number invited prospective participants to contact the researcher if they were interested. These were posted at various strategic locations on the university campus (see Appendix A).
2. A brief presentation which explained the nature of the research and time commitments was conducted in a summer class, with the permission of the course instructor. Members of the class were invited to contact the researcher if they were interested in participating.
3. A series of networking which involved other students and faculty members. In these situations, the person who suggested the individual first contacted them, and passed on the researcher's phone number. If that individual was interested in participating, he or she contacted the researcher, or indicated that it was acceptable for the researcher to contact them. In no situation was anyone contacted without prior knowledge that this might occur, or coerced to participate in any way.

All interested participants were initially contacted via telephone or e-mail to further discuss the research.

Selection Criteria

The criteria required for selection as participants were based upon Mezirow's outline of the phases of perspective transformation. Eventually, these were narrowed down to the following requirements:

1. Participants must have had a transformative experience in which they could identify some shift in how they viewed the world. The researcher made no attempt to qualify the transformative experience; instead, it was more critical that the participant felt the transformation had occurred.
2. Participants must have the ability and desire to articulate the experience.
3. Participants must feel comfortable talking about the experience. It was critical that participants did not view the research as therapy, even though the potential existed for them to gain clearer or new interpretations of their experience.
4. At least two years must have transpired between the interview time and the transformative experience. This was based on the assumption that this would allow adequate time for the participant to reflect about the experience.

Initial Contact with Prospective Participants

A total of seven individuals indicated interest in participating in the research. Five of these responded to the posters and contacted the researcher via telephone, while two were contacted as a result of the networking process. These two individuals relayed a message through the networking person indicating it was acceptable for the researcher to contact them. During the initial contact, the researcher outlined in more detail the nature of the research, the fact that the interviews would be tape-recorded, and made subsequent arrangements to meet at a convenient time and location. In one instance, an individual called back prior to the meeting, and indicated she had thought about what the participation might mean for her and decided she was not yet ready to re-live her experiences.

Six people, four females and two males, agreed to meet individually with the researcher for further discussion. These meetings unfolded as "getting together for coffee", and occurred in a public location. The purpose of these meetings was to:

1. Describe the full intent of the research, and outline what would be expected as a participant. At this point, the researcher provided each participant with a written explanation form (see Appendix B).
2. Establish the nature of the individual's transformative experience or set of experiences.
3. Ensure that the individual possessed both the ability and willingness to articulate the experience.
4. Determine that there was indication of reflection about the experiences.

5. Attempt to grasp the intuitive nature of what the relationship between research participant and researcher might be, and to ensure that both of us were comfortable conversing with each other.

Selection Process

Out of the six individuals, three were selected as participants for this research: two females and one male seemed to have the capacity to supply the richest information. Of the three who were not selected, one appeared interested in learning more about the topic of transformation than actually sharing his experiences. This individual was thanked for his time and interest, and supplied with a comprehensive reference list concerning relevant literature relating to Mezirow's interpretation of transformation. The second individual who was not selected appeared unable to provide clear articulations of her experiences. Her general body language, speech patterns, and obvious discomfort with the subject suggested that it would be difficult for her to retain emotional composure throughout in-depth interviews. Although somewhat arbitrary, the researcher did not have a "good feeling" about the rapport established during the initial meeting; as such, she was thanked for her time and interest. The third individual who was not selected was very straightforward about her interest in the research. She was experiencing a current crisis in her life, and hoped the participation might provide some answers for her. It was obvious that in this situation, very little reflection had been done since the crisis was current. Not wishing to engage in therapeutically oriented interviews, the researcher thanked her for her time and interest in the research. All of these individuals were told that their particular interests and experiences were interesting and valuable, but represented something different than what the research intended to explore.

From the three individuals who were selected, two responded through the networking procedure and one responded as a result of seeing one of the posters. Each clearly met the criteria established, seemed genuinely interested and comfortable in sharing their experiences, and provided the researcher with the intuitive feeling that a good interview rapport could be established. Once this was established, the participant was supplied with a research consent form to sign (see Appendix C), and research procedures and ethical considerations were discussed. Arrangements were made to conduct the first interview.

Ethical Considerations

All research conducted in the Department of Educational Policy Studies must be approved by an Ethics Committee. Accordingly, a proposal of this research was submitted and approved. The following specific considerations were addressed.

Informed Consent

All participants were supplied with an Explanation of Research Form (see Appendix B) which outlined the nature of the research, the expectations involved, and an indication that recalling past experiences may be emotional for some. Participants were also asked to sign the Participant Consent Agreement which indicated their agreement to the following conditions: to participate in the research; their understanding of the research intent; that the interviews would be recorded; permission to use the information as part of a Masters degree; their option to withdraw at any time; their right to decline to answer any question; that the information would remain confidential; and that the research was not intended to be threatening (see Appendix C).

Option to Withdraw at any Time

Each participant was informed that he or she could withdraw from the study at any time. This was mentioned during the initial meeting between researcher and participant, during the start of all interviews, and was part of the Consent Agreement. No participants made a choice to withdraw.

Share the Information with Participant

During all interviews, the researcher ensured that the participant was aware of the structure and direction of the interview. Subsequent to the completion of the first interview, participants were kept informed about the researcher's insights and feelings concerning the data.

Respect Each Participant

Each participant was accorded a genuine respect regarding their ideas and experiences. Part of this was achieved through the collaborative interview process, part through consistent acknowledgment of their feelings during the interview, and part through only exploring information that was relevant to the research. Participants were also encouraged to ask questions at any time, and to indicate to the researcher those questions which they did not feel comfortable answering. Each participant was also offered a copy of the final thesis.

Ensure Confidentiality

All participants were ensured the confidentiality of the information they supplied, and that their identity would remain anonymous. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym for the purposes of transcribing and writing. A transcriber was hired, and had access only to the pseudonyms. Materials were stored in a safe and secure location to which only the researcher had access.

Fully Explain the Nature and Intent of the Research

The full nature and intent of the research was clearly explained from the beginning. All participants were aware of the approximate time frames associated with their participation, the nature of the interviews, and the purpose of the research.

Data Collection

The primary means of data collection in this research was the use of semi-structured interviews. Patton (1990) refers to this interviewing technique as the "interview guide approach" (p. 283) in which a list of open ended questions assist the researcher in utilizing the interview time to the best advantage. Although the interviewer is free to probe and ask questions which may arise throughout the interview, the list provides a general direction in which all participants are asked similar questions. One of the disadvantages of this approach is that the researcher risks the problem of guiding the interview under his or her own expectations; therefore, it is important that the guiding questions be selected carefully. On the other hand, this approach does allow participants to respond in their own words and subsequently guide the interview according to their experiences which best suit the research interest.

The process of interviewing certainly requires effort beyond the simple asking of questions. It requires the interviewer to be critically alert and capable of establishing good interview rapport. As Measor (1985) indicates, the "central issue in interviewing is probably that of keeping a critical alertness about the interview, and also about yourself [the interviewer] and your own performance" (p. 76). To this extent, the quality of the data is as much dependent on the researcher as it is on the participant; consequently, it is the responsibility of the researcher to be focused and capable during all phases of the interviewing process. Part of this capability refers to the notion that the researcher must not assume the sense of "controlling power" during the interview process, but rather keep it, as much as possible, in the mode of collaboration. This assumes that the participant is given an active role in the research, however "this does not imply an abdication of responsibility on the part of the researcher; it implies, rather, an attitude of respect for the participant; it implies an openness and willingness to learn" (Weber, 1985; p. 68). Every attempt was made to follow these guidelines throughout this research.

Preliminary Steps

One of the previously identified limitations of this research addressed the researcher's interviewing skills. In an attempt to improve these skills, as well as make the requisite arrangements, the following steps were performed:

1. Discussions with other students and supervisor who had previous experience with interviewing. This helped to avoid some of the more obvious pitfalls, and also provided more resources in the form of relevant literature.
2. Development of general questions to guide the interview, as well as a list of "probe-type" questions to help in those moments of flatness (see Appendix D).
3. Practice interview using the guide questions, and then perform subsequent alterations to those questions. This process also helped me to avoid the type of question which invites one or two word responses.
4. Attempt to establish rapport during initial meetings with participants.
5. Make necessary arrangements for location of interview and recording equipment.

Interviews

A total of seven interviews were conducted: two participants were each interviewed twice, and one participant was interviewed three times. Interviews lasted between 45 and 75 minutes, and were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. All interviews were conducted in the same private and comfortable room located on the university campus.

Data Interpretation

Data interpretation, or data analysis, is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to large amounts of information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this research, a constant comparative method (Grove, 1981) was used to ensure continual connection to the data, and the derivation of meaning was strongly guided by Van Manen's (1990) approach.

Thematic Analysis

The identification of themes, which may be "understood as the structures of experience" (Van Manen, p. 79), began as a recursive process while the data were being collected. As key issues began to emerge through the interviews, the researcher made brief notes, highlighting significance, changes in body language, tone of speech, and seemingly important areas to which the interview might return. At the end of each interview, the researcher and participant debriefed the session, and this collaborative process allowed the opportunity to clarify the key issues. The researcher then spent time reflecting on the session about the perceptions and insights gained, the interview rapport, the intuitive sense of the data, and attempted to identify areas which were missed or insufficiently explored. This process was repeated for all interviews.

Once the transcripts for each participant were completed, the researcher read through the transcripts while listening to the taped version. The transcripts were then re-read to gain a more thorough feel of the data. At this point, the researcher began to reduce the data into manageable quantities. The process described below was conducted for the data obtained from each participant; in essence, the transcripts for each interview were initially analyzed independent of other interviews. For the ease of the reader, these step are presented in point form.

1. Develop coding system, which unfolded as line number from original transcript, separate computer files, meaning unit tags, and a numerical system using two categories.
2. Read transcript and isolate segments of conversation that seemed to make meaning into a separate computer file. These segments became the meaning units. Several criteria were used to determine meaning: (a) significance assigned by the participant; (b) field notes from interviewing process; (c) perceived relationship to research questions; (d) perceived relationship to the essence of transformation or reflection; (e) general intuitive perceptions of the researcher.
3. Assign a tag word to each meaning unit which seemed to capture the essence of the phrase. Tag words were then sorted according to perceived similar

meanings and relationships into clusters which seemed to capture the essence of the similarities.

4. Clusters were then grouped according to perceived similarities, which formed the basis of the emergent themes. The original meaning units from each theme were then viewed to check contextual meaning and ensure the clusters and tag words still hinged together in a way that made sense to the researcher. Clusters were moved around as necessary till each theme represented a significant and exclusive set of interpreted meanings.
5. Themes from all interviews for the participant were then viewed. Similarities and differences were noted, and shifts were made till the themes merged into related overall themes. These overall themes provided the necessary reduction in data, and the structure to begin a deeper search for the essence of the experiences.

Hermeneutic Interpretation

Once the overall themes were developed, the researcher began a deeper reflective probe into the meanings of the themes, and how they related to the interests of the research. This initially began as a reflection about my own experiences, and then comparing them to themes from the research. I returned to the original transcripts to check the contextual meanings, with the purpose of bracketing my set of expectations from the interpretation. Some minor changes in the way I understood the material occurred from this exercise.

This began the process of the hermeneutic circle, defined as "a circle of continually emerging information and interpretation that results in an ever-broadening understanding of the experience under investigation" (Barrel, et al., 1987; p. 436). The researcher reflected on each theme in relationship to transformation and reflection, and the process became a self interrogation about how and why the researcher thought the theme represented some essence of the broader phenomena in question. This provided the widening circles through which both the themes and the essences of transformation and reflection could be understood.

The end result of this process allowed the researcher to return to the original transcripts and re-interpret the contextual meanings of the experiences with an increased understanding. The themes were then classified into categories Van Manen (1990) describes as either incidental or essential. Incidental themes are those which do not contribute to the uniqueness of an experience, and essential themes are those which constitute the core essences of the experience. Differentiation between the two may be determined by asking the question: "Does the phenomenon without this theme lose its fundamental meaning?" (Van Manen, 1990; p. 107). The resulting essential themes are those which allow the researcher to develop narrative elaborations about the meaning of the experience (Van Manen, 1990). The final group of essential themes and their constituent sub-themes are those discussed in chapters 4, 5, and 6 of this thesis.

Ensuring Trustworthiness and Rigor

Trustworthiness and rigor are the ways in which the qualitative researcher establishes and maintains credibility through all phases of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). Patton (1990) indicates three major issues are related to credibility: credibility of the researcher, which is dependent on training and experience; philosophical understanding and belief in the phenomenological paradigm; and rigorous and trustworthy techniques for collecting and analyzing data. The first two of these issues have been addressed earlier in this thesis. This research addressed the third issue by utilizing the techniques listed below; again for the ease of the reader, these are presented in list form.

1. Participant check: this involved checking with the participants to ensure the accuracy of interpretations, or when ambiguous statements are encountered. The participant checks occurred during and after each interview.
2. Audit trail: the researcher made use of field notes, discussions, e-mail messages, and meetings during the collection, analysis, and writing of the data.
3. Peer consultation: researcher discussed problematic areas with peers.
4. Keep reflexive and flexible: researcher realized that some changes might occur during the research, attempted to remain open to constructive criticism, and took breaks from the research process.
5. Bracketing: this refers to Husserl's (cited in Patton, 1990) notion that the researcher must suspend preconceived notions about the research. This

occurred by identifying personal biases and attempting to keep connected with the data during the collection, analysis, and writing phases.

Preface to the Data Chapters

The following three chapters present data from the participants who believe they have undergone a transformative experience. I will seek to describe their experiences which elucidate the sense of transformation in a manner that most clearly illustrates the variety of reflective processes they are able to articulate. In essence, the reflective processes and experiences the participants share are really *reflections about their reflections*; that is, during the interviews, I ask the participants to recollect earlier experiences and describe the various ways in which these experiences had an impact in their lives. From these recollections, I attempt to describe their transformations by capturing those experiences that evidence some form of reflection as it occurred through the participant's description. In all cases, the themes represent areas in which the participant can identify and recognize some change occurring.

While I engaged in the hermeneutic process during both the interviews and the analysis, I return to the data to illustrate the intensity, emotion, and the final interpretation that represents the phenomenon of reflection. The quotations from the participants are "cleaned" only to the extent that the readability is improved. There is one exception to this: I deliberately shift from the past tense to the present tense in an attempt to enhance the reader's experience of the data. The basic goal of the following three chapters is to translate the experiences of the participants into a textual expression from which meanings about transformation and reflection might be drawn. To this extent, the chapters represent Van Manen's suggestion that the "task of phenomenological research and writing [is] *to construct a possible interpretation of the nature of a certain human experience* (p. 41).

CHAPTER 4

REDISCOVERING SELF

The name Ecru is a pseudonym the first research participant chooses, and means "wise old woman." Ecru is an educated Caucasian female in her mid forties, a single parent, affable, intelligent, articulate, and possesses a very strong inner strength. After a successful career which spans 27 years, she returns to university to pursue a developing interest in counseling psychology. Throughout a series of events, Ecru experiences a transformation in her life which significantly alters her fundamental belief structures, and creates reflective processes which differ significantly from earlier ones. She understands the transformation process to be "one that doesn't necessarily need to be intentional," and captures the essence of her experiences by stating: "looking back over my last 7 years, I would say my transformation is pretty well complete in terms of changing from an analytical view of life to a heart view of life, with some analysis because you still need that to survive in this world." In this chapter, the reader will experience Ecru's transformation and reflective processes through a series of rich themes which capture the essential elements of her experiences.

Theme Description

Ecru describes her transformation as "a spiral-like journey" with many winding roads and paths. She is able to identify several areas in her life where the journey comes to a fork in the path, and she must choose a different direction. These forks provide key windows through which we can detect the most significant aspects of her transformation; they also serve as hinges that develop into three major themes, and several sub-themes, which emerge from her interviews. The themes serve as collection points around which the researcher and participant come to understand the transformative experience using the reflective processes as the avenue of discovery. The first major theme is entitled *Whispers of Change*, and highlights the initial recognition that something is missing in her life. Her subsequent reactions to this recognition provide the first steps onto the path of transformation.

The second major theme, entitled *New Ways of Reflecting*, pivots around her discovery of new ways of reflecting. The three sub-themes which seem to capture the essence of this discovery are the *External Forces of Change*, *Reflections from the Inside*, and *Spiritual Awakenings*.

The third major theme, entitled *Rediscovering Self*, illustrates Ecru's journey to a reconnection with an abandoned sense of self. Two sub-themes explore her journey through *The Fabric of Self*, and *A New Self with New Meanings*.

The chapter is organized in a manner which allows the reader to first meet the participant, and then follow her development through the major themes outlined above. Ecru firmly believes the results and actions associated with transformation never stop; to this extent, the chapter provides a series of snapshots which illustrate the highlights of her journey.

Meeting the Participant

Ecru is a 47 year old woman who grows up in a farming community, the eldest of three children. From an early age, she develops a strong sense of responsibility and a keen attachment to animals, particularly horses. Her family is closely attached in the traditional sense, and includes two sets of grandparents; not surprisingly, her environment is supportive and remains intact today. For the most part, her early years involve the typical school related activities and chores associated with growing up on a farm. Ecru graduates from university with a degree in psychology and sociology, marries, and promptly moves to Ottawa to purse a career in human resources. This career spans 27 years, 15 of which are at the managerial level, and include a number of challenging positions which she viewed as "opportunities." She aptly sums the success of her career by stating: "I had gone pretty well as high as I wanted to go…. So, financially we were quite comfortable. I had whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted, and trips, and houses, and cars, and all the material things were there…." However, the seedlings which come to question Ecru's interpretation of success soon begin to sprout.

Her interviews evolve in a very conversational manner which indicate a firm sense of self-confidence and a genuine interest in sharing her experiences. Despite the emotionally laden content some of these experiences identify, her body language seldom shifts from being open and composed. There are few long pauses during the interviews, although occasionally the length of her responses become noticeably shorter. These relate to a common topic in which she finds the remnants of deep emotional discomfort, and she describes the discovery as "a bit of a surprise." From our first meeting, it is evident that Ecru has spent a great deal of time reflecting about her experiences and is clear about what they mean for her. At the time of this writing, Ecru is enrolled in a Masters program in counseling psychology.

Whispers of Change

The first major theme to emerge from Ecru's interviews describe her experiences through which she comes to understand that something is missing in her life. The significance of this theme unfolds as the initial recognition that she is ready and willing to challenge her current perspectives; in turn, her subsequent actions precipitate a change in her patterns of reflection. Throughout the interviews, Ecru often returns to this pivotal point in her life and describes the process as "thinking back and [realizing] the biggest thing is a feeling that something is missing. That I want more out of life."

At the age of 39, Ecru indicates that her current location in life no longer supplies an adequate sense of fulfillment. At this point she is successful in her career, financially secure, and possesses most of the material objects associated with success; however, an inner sense that something is missing ultimately emerges through the question "what else is there?" Seeking the answers to this question embark her on a path to unexpected and unfamiliar territory. The path starts with her enrollment in several communications courses which allow her the opportunity to connect with herself and others in ways that differ significantly from her previous experiences. In essence, these Landmark communication courses provide an avenue of self-discovery and sharing personal experiences through interaction with others, as well as an alternative way to interpret the world.

She describes herself as being "analytical, and so much in-my-head way of thinking." The Landmark courses provide a means for Ecru to disengage from the analytical, and subsequently engage in a process that is different for her. Ecru describes the feeling as being somewhat ethereal, but continually present:

> Where, around the age of 40ish, I think most people do go through some sort of major transition or transformation and start to reflect on where they've been, and where they want to go in the future. Certainly I am at that stage by about age 39 where I know I want to start shifting. So I start to take some Landmark communications courses on living life through communicating and connecting with others…through these courses, around age 40ish, I sort of sense that something is missing. Now I can see what was missing was getting into my heart.

The decision to enroll in these courses represent the first action that Ecru takes to address the "something is missing" feeling.

The opportunity to take the courses initially occur more out of serendipity than careful planning, one which Ecru terms an "opportunistic situation." Despite consciously seeking "a course that would have been right for me," Ecru takes the first course when her friend's husband is unable to attend. The result of the first weekend are both pronounced and effective:

> And I really don't even know what I am getting into, but intuitively I feel that, yeah, okay, I'll give it a try. And so, there it is, just handed to me. And by the end of the weekend, it really starts to change my whole life… people are… working through some of their problems. Just different ways of looking at things. And I'd never been exposed to anything like that in my life.

Ecru continues to take these courses over a two and one-half year period, and the exposure to this environment initiates a number of changes.

Perhaps the most important change involves a shift from an analytical perspective to one more intuitive: "…so that is quite involved because [there is] some introspection, and just sort of diarizing. [At this point], I think I start to reflect a little bit, and I don't really realize that's what it is called at the time, but just jotting down ideas here and there." The importance of the "diarizing," or writing in journals, becomes much more relevant to Ecru in only a short period of time.

Another important change emanating from the Landmark courses involves her interaction with others. Ecru becomes more comfortable with responding to her emotions and her intuition, and describes these situations as " being the start, or continuation, of my sharing, and being supported in doing that. And I start to do that a lot more, in a safe environment with friends." Both her husband and her friends begin to notice these changes:

> with my husband particularly because he could see…a different me evolving. I could sense that he wasn't too sure … and so he's feeling a little concerned about all of these changes he could sense in me. Possibly because I am speaking my mind more. You know, I am becoming more assertive, and more sharing, and pressing for more answers and decisions in our relationship. And also with friends. I am becoming more…speaking from the heart, and less analytical. That takes a long, long time.

However, the answers and decisions that Ecru seeks soon take an unanticipated turn, and she comes to experience the feeling that something is missing in a much more physical and traumatic way.

New Ways of Reflecting

The second major theme to emerge from the interviews with Ecru describes a series of events which significantly alters the direction in which her life unfolds. These events originally occur through the influence of external sources; however, they soon propel her into the deepening layers of internal reflection. The significance of this theme resides in the mixing of the external with the internal, and the continuing reference to her experiences emanating from the communication courses. It is within the context of this theme that Ecru seriously challenges her previous way of being, and develops new passages in her reflective processes.

External Forces of Change

Within two years of taking her first Landmark course, Ecru and her husband adopt an 8 day old baby, and within a 12 hour period find themselves "parents with no training…whereas most other people get a 9 month preparatory, we got 11 hours kind of thing." Slightly more than one year later, Ecru's husband commits suicide. Ecru finds herself being alone for the first time in her life:

> And all of a sudden he is gone, and so there is my coach gone. I am on my own. That's a big change because until I married, I lived with my parents on

> the farm till I was 18. When I turned 18, I went to university, into residence, and then married, so it was kind of like never being out on my own. I never had to stand alone, and now to be a single mom of a one year old, that is quite a shock to my system.

And she feels "numb, totally numb." Ecru relates the initial days after her husband's death:

> So that is a major turning point, and now I am just kind of numb, totally numb. On remote you know, like do what I have to do mechanically, and then…I guess that's where people talk of the dark days. So, I think for about 6 weeks. The first 2 weeks I [stay] with my parents, and they are wonderful support. [I return home] and they stay with us for the next couple of weeks. And it kind of gets into a routine. Get my daughter back into daycare, and I stay away for about 6 weeks. I start to get these things back together, slowly.

Although she experiences all of the things, instrumental and emotional, associated with losing a partner, Ecru also finds herself being intuitively guided by her Landmark course experiences. Talking with supportive friends proves to be cathartic, and she escalates her commitment to paying more attention to the heart by realizing that "there's nothing analytical left to go back to, so it is kind of one extreme of being so analytical at work, and that life, it really ends, and [now] I am operating totally out of feeling, and sharing, and hoping…."

This realization becomes a significant turning point in Ecru's reflective processes. She seeks counseling, and states that:

> as I talk to the psychologist, I become aware of the importance of the boundaries that in a way I am intuitively setting for myself. Family knows everything, and my very, very close couple of friends. And then I have this second layer of boundaries where I have another group of pretty close friends that I see and trust. And then I kind of have a third layer of boundaries where I talk in general terms about, you know, the suicide. But by the time I get out to this broader boundary, people become pretty uncomfortable with even talking about suicide because I sense that… I think as Canadians, we have a real hard time with death, let alone talking about suicide.

Knowing that others may become uncomfortable discussing suicide suggests a clear understanding of perspectives that are different from her own. By using these boundaries, and by acting on the feelings from her heart rather than the thoughts from her head, Ecru's relationship with family and friends intensify and deepen. "We each have our own role, and I can rely on them in times of emergency." The counseling also initiates several internal shifts relative to how she seeks the answers to her questions.

Reflections from the Inside

The counseling sessions also encourage Ecru to keep journals. Instinctively, she chooses a black journal to record the "dark days" and today, the journal is difficult for her to open. She is very clear about the value of writing in the journal, and describes it as a great assistance in the healing process. The process unfolds as:

> just spending time with myself journaling before [the counseling session], and listing out questions, and afterwards writing down my interpretation of what was said, and my feelings before and after. That really helps because I only have half an hour with this counselor. To go in with prepared questions, and things that are on my mind, give it a focus, and then I know all my needs will be met…. Probably by about the third or fourth time of doing this, I have all these questions in my journal. I actually hold them there, and start having them all answered.

This process is something quite different for her, and when asked if she has always written questions to herself, she replies:

> No, I wouldn't have dreamed of writing questions to myself, because that's kind of being in touch with yourself. And I was always living externally, here's all my goals, here's my objectives, and here's what I'm going to do and accomplish next. So, very different this journaling, and just being with myself.

Ecru continues to journal, but her choice of colors change to green and then pink, which are more resonant with brightness.

Ecru begins to move further from the "dark days" into "brighter days" by selling her house and car, and replacing them with ones that seem to be more in line with what she feels she needs. The new house is near her close friends, and the car is a practical four door sedan that is more adaptable to family necessities. She does this without assistance, and demonstrates a strong willpower to continue with her life. This is not unusual for her; in the past, she often made important and key decisions in the absence of her husband. However, in these current situations, the decisions are not made solely from the logical relationship with her head, but also include the newer relationship with her heart.

Anger begins to emerge into conscious levels for Ecru. She describes this symbolically through two dreams she remembers vividly. The first involves herself, and her daughter and husband. They are all on horses, which begin to rear, leap and froth because wolves are attempting to surround them. Ecru and her family attempt to escape down a dark road, but are unsuccessful: the wolves completely surround them and they all begin to scream, including the horses. At this point she awakens. The second dream involves a seemingly docile bull. Aware of the bull's presence, Ecru attempts to cross the corral but the bull turns toward her, at which point she sees the large horns. The bull chases, catches, and begins to gore her, at which point she awakens. She interprets these dreams as a manifestation of her anger:

> the bull is actually my husband, kind of turning, you know, from docile into something that would kill the two parts, the one I thought I knew, and the one I didn't know. And I can't remember how I interpreted the one with the horses, other than trying to escape, and being on a journey, and maybe that's the start of my journey.

Spiritual Awakenings

Shortly after her counseling ends, Ecru develops an interest in alternative methods of body work which focus on body energy and how to connect to that energy. She enrolls in several courses in an attempt to deal with the loneliness and pain, yet she suggests that another search is starting. This search mirrors her earlier "something is missing" feeling, but is much more inclusive: it is "a search for a meaning, what is going to be the meaning of my life." These courses propel her into a different belief system, one in which "we're all interconnected in a broader, more universal transformative sense." She describes the shift as thinking "I am connected, and have my own sense of the way of synchronicity, and the ways of being. I'm at a different level." The effects of these courses leave her feeling "more grounded. And more soulful…[and that] I think is the essence of it."

Ecru begins to incorporate a number of practices she learns from Reiki and Qi Gong into her daily life. Guided imageries, doing the Qi Gong, and quiet meditations become a morning activity which she practices today:

> So probably at this point, I'm spending minimum 30 to 40 minutes, sometimes 40 or 50 on the weekend. I'll do that, just to be with myself…and the other thing I'm learning with that is a part of what I'm really doing is a catharsis, getting rid of all that old stale energy in my body, and just kind of sounding it out of there. It's cathartic every morning.

In these times of quietness, she begins to ask herself questions about a variety of issues in a way that is substantially different:

> And so that's where I start to ask myself more and more questions, and looking internally for my own answers. Whereas up until then, I'd ask my girlfriends, or family, and I am kind of getting the answers externally, and my teachers, and

> everybody else knows better than I do. Now, I've shifted…I'm getting my own answers really clearly and strongly, and feel good about that.

Receiving her own answers instill Ecru with a stronger sense of self confidence, and she effectively incorporates her spiritual learning into her internal framework of understandings and beliefs.

This shift involves a decreasing reliance on externally imposed expectations she uses to define and accept herself, both as a person and as a woman; instead, she gravitates to the use of internally based influences. Ecru describes the process as gaining:

> confidence in myself that what I choose is right for me, and it doesn't really matter what other people think. That's a big learning for me. This has been ingrained in me through my upbringing, both my mom, and also my dad to a certain extent … very important to them what other people think. 'Oh, you shouldn't do this because what'll so-and-so think?' And now I'm of the belief, who cares, you know.

She continues to say: "if it feels right to me, I'm going to do it."

Rediscovering Self

The third major theme that emerges involves Ecru's recognition that her experiences seem to be a reconnection to, or a rediscovery of, self. The significance of this theme unfolds as her ability to re-examine her sense of self using different reflective processes. In essence, this theme acts as the hinge that connects the previous two themes into the loops of the spiral which she describes her transformation as resembling.

The Fabric of Self

With an increased sense of self confidence and a willingness to address the world through different lenses, Ecru begins to challenge the basic fabric that defines her position in life. She recognizes the most salient stitch of this fabric as being the influence under which the logic of a "patriarchal analytic model" structures her development, and the influences and roles the corporate environment and social environment play in shaping her premises.

Ecru describes her experiences in the corporate world as a "busy life" which involve a set of influences that create some confusion within her. She now recognizes these influences as stemming from:

> the male model of being analytical, looking at all the facts and figures, and as concrete as possible making the best, the right decision. And it was particularly only one way, once you got all this concrete stuff analyzed. And now I'm seeing this in a quite different way of looking at things, that if you look at it from a feminist viewpoint...and I've just discovered that, hey, all along I think I have been a feminist, and I just denied it.

Within her "busy life," Ecru indicates a number of struggles, most of which involve managerial sorts of decisions and conflicts that challenged her values and beliefs regarding the importance of relationships rather than power. She eloquently captures the essence of the spiral that returns her to herself: "now I'm realizing I've been struggling to be feminine for so long, and now that I'm in counseling, it's kind of like I'm coming home, and it feels right. And it's been a long time."

Much of this shift emerges as a result of her reflections about who she is and why she is participating in a system that makes her feel uncomfortable. Listening to her intuition becomes a part of her daily life, and she describes it as "just amazing, this intuition…I just listen to my inner voice. It just kind of blows me away." Ecru continues to relate an example of walking down the hallway with a destination in mind and suddenly feeling a strong urge to go to the coordinator's office, where she meets several of her student peers. They collectively manage to sort out a number of mutual problems, and the intuition appears to offer valuable guidance in this situation. She captures the essence of this moment:

> Like, it was a major moment. And I don't think I would have been in touch, even a year ago, and have that amount of trust in, and level of awareness to my intuition. Certainly, 4-1/2 years ago it was zero. It was the closest thing to zero as far as listening to my intuition…and that gets right back into the patriarchal model, where I was just pushed right out of it…there's no room.

A New Self with New Meanings

When asked to visually describe what her transformation might look like, Ecru suggests a spiraling activity in which she returns to some part of herself that was previously put on hold. She now finds herself thinking about her earlier life on the farm, where until the age of 21, she "spends a lot of time riding [horses], just quiet, and just enjoying the walk and the gait…the trotting, and just the quietness of that. So, there probably was something going on there, but I wasn't totally aware." In essence, she is aware of feelings of contentment within herself, but they are put on hold in favor of a "busy life" that involves career aspirations and punctuated by strong concerns of what others think about her.

She indicates her rural upbringing created an early sense of having roots, and having time alone with the animals allow an introspective nature to develop in seedling form. Unfortunately, the seedling received very little nourishment for a number of years, and its development, though not destroyed, is certainly arrested. Through these years, Ecru's typical patterns of reflection involve a logical and rational process which address the immediate problem at hand. This process serves her well during the "busy days" of being totally analytical; however, at the "something is missing" phase, it no longer supplies the types of answers she seeks. Nor does it supply the kinds of explanations that account for her feelings and sense of intuition that begin to permeate her conscious levels. To illustrate this, Ecru cites an example framed around vacations. In previous years, she and her husband carefully organized the trip in a very concrete manner; today, she is much more prone to indulge in the "spontaneity" of the moment, and take day trips with very little planning. In her words, "its different. It feels different, coming from a different place."

When asked what it currently means to engage in the reflective process, Ecru incorporates a number of processes:

> Big thing for me is setting some time to make a point of when something's happened, good or bad, and either write it down on paper as part of my journaling process, … or maybe draw an image of it, and have it on record. Sometimes it will show up in my dreams. Any of those input ways are then methods by which I can be with myself in my thoughts, and make sense of what has happened. And in doing that, make it more meaningful for where I choose to go in the future. So, in a way, reflection is a time to do any correction. I like doing it that way. I'll continue or, no, it didn't work so well, and let's do it differently next time. It's a time for change, reinforcing good or bad, giving myself some pats on the back. Lots of things can happen in a reflection.

This is a distant path from the one which uses the logic of the "patriarchal analytic model"; her reflective processes now incorporate a healthy inclusion of what "feels right to me."

Despite her reduced dependence on the patriarchal model, Ecru retains a strong sense of balance within her world, which is reinforced through many of her actions. She is punctual, keen to set future times and dates for the interviewing schedule, and understands the rigors of balancing academic pursuits with family life. Today, Ecru is confident, energetic, and pursues her goals with a strong sense of commitment. She clearly realizes that her transformation is never finished, and continues to grow as an individual utilizing a different set of assumptions to guide her.

Summary

Ecru's transformation unfolds in a typical Mezirowian fashion, and she describes it as being on a journey with many paths and winding roads. The essence of her transformation unfolds as the "sense of changing from an analytical view of life to a more of a heart view of life, with some analysis because you still need that to survive in this world." A key element in the "heart view of life" involves the recognition of an intuitive sense that extends well beyond one implanted in a cognitive realm; rather, her meaning of intuition stems from spiritual sources that redefine what it means for her to participate in her environment. Ecru discovers the strength of her intuition through a series of reflective processes that include counseling and a developing interest in alternative ways of healing. Throughout both interviews, Ecru continually refers to the importance of coming into contact with her affective realm, and provides numerous instances that differentiate her previous analytical methods with her current affective methods. Although she provides numerous examples which elucidate her transformation, there are a series of events and actions that illustrate her reflective processes.

In the major theme entitled *Whispers of Change*, Ecru triggers her transformation through a content reflection that begins to challenge what it is that she wants from life. Within this theme, there appears to be occurrences of process reflections as well; for example, the reflections about how she is perceiving the effects from her journaling and where she becomes more aware that she is "speaking from the heart." The Landmark courses provide the opportunity to engage in a form of reflection that is foreign to her. She begins to see value in sharing her feelings *with* others, and to listen with more acuity *about* the feelings of others; in short, she steps forward to a path which enables her to question a number of assumptions about herself and others. Although there seems to be no evidence of premise reflection in this theme, somewhat paradoxically it seems to set in motion the entire transformative experience.

Within the second theme, the *External Forces of Change* addresses a number of instrumental and emotional problems extending from the death of her husband. Although this is a critical event in Ecru's life, it seems to act more as a propellant than as an actual major turning point in her reflective processes. The death of her husband creates an externally imposed situation where she must devote a great deal of energy to adapting to life without her partner, becoming a single parent, and healing from the wounds and despair. In a spiral-like fashion, Ecru moves into process reflection as she dialogues with her counselor, and starts to understand how she is setting boundaries and what that means for her. The sub-theme *Reflections from the Inside* seems to resonate with both content and process reflections; as well, there appears to be some evidence of a meaning scheme shift as she begins to use her journaling as part of the healing process. Prior to the counseling, she did not use journaling. It is also within this sub-theme that the dreams which Mezirow associates with presentational construal allow Ecru the opportunity to explore some of anger emanating from the death of her husband. The sub-theme *Spiritual*

Awakenings seems to unfold mostly as a series of process reflections as Ecru searches for the "meaning" of her life. A shift in a meaning scheme appears to occur at the point when she realizes that her meditations in the quietness provide answers in a way that is significantly different; that is, she uses internal sources rather than external sources to arrive at solutions. The meditations subsequently becomes an integral part of her reflective processes, and continue to play a major role in her decision making strategies. This example also seems to hint of an epistemic premise reflection in that she accepts a different source of knowledge as being legitimate.

In the third major theme, entitled *Rediscovering Self*, it is possible to detect the clearest example of premise reflection. Ecru recognizes the *Fabric of Self* by challenging "patriarchal male model" and realizing the strong ways in which it defines her sense of self. She emerges from the reflection in the sub-theme *A New Self with New Meanings*, as a self confident individual who allows her intuition to be a strong guiding voice.

CHAPTER 5

THE PRISON OF BEING SHALLOW

Susan is a 47 year old woman born in rural Quebec. She is thoughtful, intelligent, and as her story unfolds, it becomes clear that her depth of reflection and ability to articulate this depth indicates an individual who is accustomed to initiating change in her life. On the surface, she appears strong-willed; below the surface, she possesses an unparalleled inner strength that precipitates genuine concern for those who are less fortunate. The variety of changes and experiences in Susan's life provides a rich and colorful exploration into a world resonant with deep reflection. Susan understands transformation to have "varied meanings" and firmly believes that "as human beings, we are constantly in a process of transformation." She describes her transformation as a continuous and circular process of change that begins very early in her life. In this chapter, the reader will experience the depth and richness of a transformative process that includes a multitude of deepening reflective layers which ultimately unfold as a quest for freedom from a set of shallow boundaries.

Theme Description

Susan indicates she has spent a great deal of time reflecting about her life, and during the interviews, she often shifts from one life experience to another in order to portray significant connections. Much of Susan's life unfolds as a kaleidoscopic series of events in which she consistently questions her cognitive, affective, and participatory roles; however, there are distinctive links between these events which connect together to form the basis of three key themes. Susan is adamant that her early life experiences play a major role in shaping and determining her later reflective processes. Accordingly, the first major theme, entitled *Perspective Foundations* describes these early years and the experiences which tend to shape her perspectives. In the first sub-theme, entitled *Living Parallel Lives*, Susan explores the family expectations which create feelings of significant anger and betrayal. In the second sub-theme, entitled *Escaping Tradition*, Susan reflects about the cultural expectations which propel her into a search for want she wants to do with her life.

The second major theme, *Searching for Meaning*, develops under two sub-themes. The first, entitled *A New Self*, leads the reader through a series of events including surgery, counseling, and a significant shift in her understanding of people. The second sub-theme, entitled *Soul Searching*, explores the ways in which Susan reflects about her past life, and how she moves into a sense of spiritual awareness.

The third major theme, *Discovering the Depths of Shallowness*, provides a rich set of reflections where Susan comes to reinterpret qualities about herself. The first sub-theme, entitled *Exploring Shallow*, connects the ways in which an early labeling process creates a misinformed meaning perspective. *Escaping the Boundaries of Prison*, which is the second sub-theme, provides an apt metaphor to describe Susan's reflections about re-examining her understandings of herself.

This chapter is organized in a manner that allows the reader to first meet the participant, then follow her development through the themes outlined above. Susan provides a rich contextual recollection of her experiences, and the themes draw from instances which provide the clearest illumination.

Meeting the Participant

Susan is the eldest child in a family which experiences the loss of several siblings, and the adoption of two others. From an early age, she develops a strong sense of responsibility that often manifests as "helping somebody that is slow learning, or somebody having difficulty forming letters, or somebody having difficulty reading, or those types of tasks."

At 18 years of age, she finds herself living independently in Montreal where she "basically spent 3 years exploring, and trying to test this new found freedom of what it means to be by yourself." Susan conducts this exploration in the cultural milieu of Montreal during the tumultuous late '60's and early 70's where political volatility and bike gangs are more than references heard on the news broadcasts.

Her adult years also include a failed marriage, a series of major surgeries, a return to the educational environment, and the adoption of a child. After undergoing a hysterectomy, which becomes a major turning point in her life, Susan recognizes a void that seriously challenges her perception of who she is.

> How am I going to fill that void? And that's where I think it pushes me to do a lot more of the interior work that I need to do, knowing there's only so much to this material world. Yes, I can have all the [material things], but there is part of me still missing something. Where is it? How is it going to come to me?

The clarity and depth of her reflections about her life pave insightful roads into the understanding of how an individual comes to make meaningful life changes. Indeed, the ring of "*How is it going to come to me*?" mirrors many of her decisions. The interviews with Susan evolve in layers of increasing depth; her responses are long, carefully constructed, and often include pauses in which she appears to be looking into the past. Susan is currently enrolled in a doctoral program at the University of Alberta.

Perspective Foundations

During the interviews with Susan, she continually refers to experiences which occur early in her life. Although these experiences create some of the walls she learns to dismantle, they also form a structure on which she learns to question values and assumptions at a very early age. The overall significance of this theme lies in the illumination of how perspectives come to shape our interpretations of meaning, and the evidence of introspection at an early age.

Living Parallel Lives

Susan is born in a Crèche, which is an institution for unwed mothers, and spends the first eight months of her life in this "very anonymous place." Her care then transfers to her grandparents where she stays until the age of three, when she is reunited with her birth mother. She reports that even at this young age, she recalls being confused from the transition. Through reflections later in her life, Susan feels the "lack of bonding becomes a strong point because it allows me to say the attachment is not the same."

Being the eldest of several children, Susan finds herself immersed in the role of surrogate parenthood early in her life. Her mother experiences several difficult pregnancies which result in hospitalization, and Susan finds herself providing care to her younger siblings on a continual basis. She begins to question her mother's belief that as a Catholic, it is a woman's responsibility to bear children. This gradually develops into feelings of anger and betrayal:

> when I talk about the pregnancies in the family, and the number of siblings, and my mother being hospitalized, I remember growing more and more angry, and having the sense of betrayal. As a child, my needs are not important. It is okay for my mother, due to the Catholic belief that it is a woman's duty to have children, to go through these horrendous experiences of bedridden pregnancies followed by the death of a child, followed by hospitalization to deal with that trauma. And yet there are already children at home who need this mother, but that is not the priority.

Susan continues to describe the impact of these pregnancies on her early years by recollecting her feelings each time her mother announced another pregnancy:

> So every time my mother would say, 'I'm pregnant again,' I'd say: 'oh God, here we go.' I know the scenario…and there is nothing I can do. There is nothing I can say. I am given these responsibilities and it is taken for granted. There is never a word of acknowledgment. It is taken for granted that I will just jump in and do it, and that is the end of it.

The essence of these experiences create in Susan an early awareness that as a woman, there exists a set of perceived responsibilities that appear to define her future roles.

During a time when her mother is "unstable and requires hospitalization," Susan forgoes attending school for a year, and she recalls "really resenting that." The missed year of school put Susan out of touch with her peers. Although she returns to school for a year, she describes the situation as "difficult" because she has two different lives that parallel each other.

> I cannot equate with my peer group. I mean, they are talking dating, and about the dance, and everything else. I do my school work, and then go home, and raise a family and provide for 6 kids and my dad. And help with other duties of the farm. I am living two lives, two parallel lives…and I am already traveling from one to the other. So, even when I do well, I am losing interest.

Living two parallel lives is not new for Susan: as a young child, the years she spends with her grandparents contribute to an early recognition of having two sides to herself. Her grandfather teaches her about the land, animals, and instills a love of reading and fishing. In essence, he is "the dreamer, the more intellectual… he does things that other people don't do. So, he is a bit mystic…he [is not] concerned with material aspects of everyday life." In contrast, her grandmother is "very practical" and Susan learns from her how to look after people by adopting the traditional female roles prominent in her culture.

Susan realizes that "because of the tension between [my grandparents], I learn very early to be two different people. Maybe not two different people. It's like two sides of me that are allowed to develop parallel." The idea of parallel lives, or having two sides, is one which clings to Susan through much of her life; often, they unfold as an encounter between practicality and the desires of "just doing." Later in her life, she understands the two sides as being an asset:

> I have these two sides to myself, and I guess that's, that's a legacy in a way. At times I think I wish I didn't have that. I thought for years it was a disadvantage, and again that is shallow. Now, I see it as an asset because these are the things that make me able to have an idea, and a plan, and a vision, and concretize it. Not too many people have that...but it's a lot of work.

Escaping Tradition

The cultural environment in which Susan grows up creates a series of expectations that she learns to challenge at an early age, and involves roles defined through the church and her education. Her community is of strong Catholic origin, and women are encouraged to assume traditional roles within the family setting. The cycle involving her mother's numerous pregnancies and hospitalizations confuses Susan, and she questions the church values at an early age:

> Confusion that as a woman, you have certain things that you have to do even if you don't want to do them. There is very negative understanding and application of what marriage is about, what relationships are about. It is more to do with duty and what the church wants you to do.... Things that I question as early as age 7 and, and even before. Suddenly, I can't understand God wanting you to go through all these horrendous pregnancies. What about your other children? What about these other obligations? So the role of women with the church, the role of women as child bearing people, and the whole

> dynamics of marriage and relationships. I think it defined very early what I didn't want. Very much.

The confusion is further perpetuated through family expectations that she will simply step into the role of "parent" when the need arises.

Responsibility is not isolated to her immediate family life. Much of her early education is provided by the "strict and disciplinarian" methods of nuns, and at the age of nine or ten, Susan finds herself exhibiting a similar parental role with her schoolmates:

> even at that time, I already have an approach where if there are kids left out, or kids that have no lunch, or kids that don't have clean uniforms, or those types of things, usually I take them under my wings and help them or be with them. So, that is there already. I am known as being a very responsible child, and I am often delegated by the nuns to help somebody that is slow learning, or somebody having difficulty forming letters, or somebody having difficulty reading, or those types of tasks.

Although Susan indicates she feels "comfortable" in this role at school, there is little opportunity in her environment that offers escape from the responsibilities, and they continue to exert influence through later years.

By the time she is 21, she "is still taking care of everybody else" and finds herself being disillusioned with situations in which her friends "visit because there is food…or a place to crash." Working as a bar waitress in Montreal exposes Susan to a variety of lifestyles where drugs, bike gangs, and political unrest form her social environment; however, her personal participation occurs only on a peripheral level despite her desire to "fit in" with her friends. Disillusionment quickly turns into anger, and she vividly recalls her thoughts and feelings as being a sense of disconnection where she believes she does not "belong or fit anywhere."

The anger permeates much of her life, and the "negative energy" drains her and leaves no nourishment:

> And gradually everything becomes more and more cynical, more meaningless. I'm not being fed…like vampires, you know. I feel like I am being drained and what will be left of me? There would be nothing left. It is a very, very difficult time where I am scared of myself in terms of the amount of anger that I have, yet I try desperately to control that anger. The more energy I put into controlling that anger, the less energy I have for other things.

Susan refers to these as "crazy times" in which she coasts through life without a clear sense of direction. Sleeping with a knife under her pillow for protection, Susan realizes "this is crazy. This is nuts…and I start separating and getting a different view as to how it is really impacting me…. At 21, I start saying what do I want to do with my life?"

The "crazy times" also propel Susan into a darkness where thoughts of suicide surface, and she attributes a "biblical voice" as the source that restrains her desire to swallow a handful of pills. In essence, Susan finds herself in a state of depression and confusion where:

> I don't have too much self respect for myself at this time. If nobody cares for me, why should I care? Well, I don't even know how to care. I think caring is providing a roof over my head, clothes, and things like that, the necessities...but I don't know how to care for myself. I don't know how to set boundaries. I can't say 'no'. It is a difficult time and I keep feeling that nobody cares. And if they care, then they must have an ulterior motive, or I don't care about them, so why should they care about me.

Susan decides to leave the culture of Montreal and her friends, and moves to Alberta in order to "take the time to get away and do that break."

Searching for Meaning

A series of health problems precipitate reflections about what it means to be a woman, and in turn, she explores her personal connection to that meaning. During her mid twenties and early thirties, a number of events occur which alter the course of her life. The significance of this theme emerges as her ability to turn the reflective processes into reflective actions.

A New Self

After her brush with suicide at 21, Susan moves to Alberta in order to improve her English language skills; within a year, she moves to Toronto where she begins working in the banking system. Her work responsibilities quickly escalate till she is promoted to a senior position in Montreal. Although she contacts a few of her old friends in Montreal, she realizes that:

> we are worlds apart by now. My views are different. It's not that I don't like them, but that I don't like the lifestyle...I don't like what they represent. And I'm not interested in going back down the despair route that I had been before. So, even if I am making a lot less money than I had been used to, the peace of mind is still worth it. So, I stick with my choice and carry on with building a career for myself.

The career with the bank comes to an end when Susan marries, moves to Quebec City, and begins another successful career in the insurance industry.

Her marriage is less successful. After a two year period, she realizes she has "a marriage that isn't a marriage.... My health is affected, and I have a lot of stress symptoms...I realize I need to get away." However, the pressures of her family and culture once again exert influence: "So [it is] a difficult time, and eventually, in spite of the opposition of the family, in spite of the judgment, in spite of losing some of the things I have, I move [to Edmonton]."

Shortly after moving to Edmonton, Susan begins to experience a series of health problems which involve several major surgeries. One of these is a hysterectomy, and this precipitates a deep reflective process where she examines her "identity as a woman." Susan reveals a series of perceptual changes that occur for her:

> It changes me in a sense that I start looking for other ways in which I can channel the caring, and the loving, and attracting that into my life by choice [rather than] by biological function. Knowing that I could express the maternal

> side in a different way. And later on I adopt a child…by choice. For me it, it is liberating in many ways. It is also letting go of a lot of the negative teachings of what a woman is, and redefining who I am, and accepting that. So from a long line of women equated with reproduction, that's very interesting.

Understanding that she has some choice, the reflection allows her the freedom to fulfill her maternal desires through the action of adoption.

The hysterectomy also produces a state of depression in Susan, and she seeks professional counseling. She enrolls in a 12 Step program to address her addiction to food; however, the program initiates a series of emotional issues that engulf her and she seeks professional counseling. With the assistance of the therapist, she begins to:

> start looking at some of the depression, some of the patterns there. I start looking at some of the anger that I have. Because once I start lifting the top of this cess pool, the anger had always been there, and suddenly I need to look at that. Where did it come from? How does it go? And how am I using it and misusing it, and so on. I start looking at grief, and issues of abandonment, and my failed marriage…

During this period, Susan experiences high levels of stress and anxiety which soon manifest as breathing problems and asthma attacks. She realizes that her job represents the "wrong environment" and once again experiences the feelings of duality within her life: "I feel there is only a part of me that's robotic…and there is this greater part of me that is not even in the picture. So I begin demanding more. Something more involved, something more meaningful."

One of the most significant realizations which emerge from the therapy sessions is the examination of Susan's perception of people. Through the recognition that people create a sense of fear within her, Susan learns to become "open to different types of validation." The initial feelings of being "displaced and disconnected" gradually diminish, and eventually turn to reflection about what it means to be critical:

> before I had been critical, and that's very different than [looking at things] critically. Critical means that I take the negative side of things, but I also take it personally. I do a lot of bitching. When I start looking at things critically, I remove myself and look at things for what they are without it having an impact on me, and seeing my role in it. So that allows me the space to not take everything personally. It's not all about me. And I gain some room to maneuver in a different direction.

When asked about the impact this understanding has in her life, Susan replies: "it has an impact on how I do things...an impact on everything from here on because suddenly it gives me a different perspective on many things."

Citing examples which illustrate the impact, Susan includes a series of activities which are new for her: yoga, cycling, personal growth activities, and buying her first car which she aptly names "Freedom." With Freedom, she becomes less house bound and begins "peeling off layers" from her life; in a figurative sense, her perspective becomes one of inquiry rather than one of acceptance. Her friends also notice that she is "looking at life in a very different way, and giving back instead of taking." Shortly after, Susan ends her career working with numbers and begins working with people at a women's shelter.

Soul Searching

The choice to have children is no longer an option, and Susan enters a phase of her life where substantive reflections and actions begin to occur. She describes these times as the re-questioning of her past:

> here I am in my early 30's, maybe I have cancer…I don't know what's happening, you know, what is life about. So, [I begin] a period of soul searching…where I start to really look back on my life. Seriously look back, and I have professional help…all kinds of different ways to try to understand some of the abuse I had grown up with, and also the dysfunction in my marriage, and some of the other family problems that had been there. And, for the first time in my life I start gaining a sense that nothing is for nothing. [I realize] the incidents happen for a reason, that somehow they have a shaping influence...I would not be the person I am. I can see some of the good of that for me.

The "soul searching" brings to light her desire to work with people as opposed to numbers, and once again Susan makes a deliberate decision to change her career.

She enrolls in a skill coach training course, and describes the experience as the most difficult thing in her life. Throughout the course, other students question the core of her belief structure and eventually Susan looks at "certain behaviors, and certain attitudes…and realize that if I want to work with people I have to do it very responsibly, and in a different mode than what I thought." Working with abused women in a local shelter teaches her how to find joy and hope in the "little things" amidst a constellation of negative events. She then transfers to working with young offenders in a group home, and despite her initial reluctance of working with teenagers, comes to enjoy the challenges. This also offers Susan "a second chance, in many ways, of understanding what I have gone through, and why I have been so angry, and why I have been so in pain, and so rebellious. So, it leads me to reinterpreting my life again."

Susan eventually repositions the newly learned skills from her course, and moves to a northern native community in an educational capacity. She describes this experience as entering "a time warp of about 40 years" that returns her to the setting of her grandparent's environment.

> It takes me back to my roots, and I start pulling from there things that I had learned very young but forgotten in between. So, there is no television, no radio…and there is a lot of time outside of class to read, reflect…. There is complete silence…and I realize that I have avoided it for part of my life. That's where a lot of the reflection…starts appearing in terms of you can reflect to a certain level, but it's so shallow when you compare it to the depth that you can go to in the silence.

The silence is more than the absence of sound; it includes entering into an internal dialogue where the environment "allows for other rhythms to emerge."

This environment also opens the door of spiritual awareness for Susan, and she attributes this awakening to spending time with the "elders [who] give me a foundation to know what to do with these energies. And how to work with them and [know] where they come from." This provides Susan with a different way of understanding and doing, which she describes as being:

> more in tune with my own energy levels and cycles. I'm also more in tune to energies around certain activities, or events, or places, or people, so I am able to approach the situation differently. I'm a lot more open to entering into something without an agenda. And then, I wait … before I had to have the whole mapped. Now, I can just say, okay, I want to go there, let's go check it out. And it's not like a final thing.

Prior to these experiences, a sense of rationality based on the "fear of losing control and bottled anger" precludes any serious reflection about these energies. Susan is very clear about the impact the spiritual connections have in her life: "I think that my process comes at the time when I am ready for it. There's no use pushing something when I'm not ready…I just do what I do and I don't judge it on the linear type of thing anymore."

Discovering the Depths of Shallowness

The third major theme emerges under the rubric of "being shallow." It is intrinsically connected with a series of experiences throughout Susan's life where she assumes herself to be shallow. This position is adopted from an early age, and remains until a reflective period in the silence of the northern bush illuminates a different understanding. The significance of this theme unfolds through the depth of the reflective process and the degree to which Susan reinterprets previous experiences.

Exploring Shallow

Susan recalls the origins of her thinking she is shallow from an early age. As a child, she remembers feeling a discrepancy between shallow and a deeper feeling part of her.

> I used to think I was shallow. I remember when I was young, my first few times where I step out to look at something and saying 'that's irrelevant. That's not important, just move on.' And for the longest time I was hard on myself. I used to think it was because I was shallow. And I didn't like that because I knew I felt things very deeply, yet I couldn't reconcile that other part. I didn't know what to do. I didn't know the reasons for that, and I thought it was a flaw.

As Susan begins to explore these reasons, she comes to realize the broad influence they exert on many aspects of her life. Susan thinks of herself as shallow because she never seems to be content with her current situation, and because of the "wanderlust" her grandfather instills at an early age.

Eventually, she is able to assign a more inclusive meaning to the term shallow, which unfolds as:

> having a short attention span to certain things, which implies everything would have to have the same level of emotional involvement. Everything should be very serious and have the same [meaning]. I think it is this overdue sense that you have to be the same in everything.... It is a false sense of what should be, based on other people's values. The fact that I am not married, the fact that I'm still moving around is considered very shallow in my family.

Yet the arrival at this understanding of shallow requires a deep reflection precipitated by a personal observation.

Susan uses the word shallow to describe herself one day, and suddenly realizes "that's not right. I'm not shallow." At this point in her life, Susan is again teaching in the northern community where she first begins her educational career. She is "surrounded by bush" and begins to reflect about her assumption that she possesses the qualities of a shallow person:

> I start to look at this, and these are not the characteristics of a shallow person. And reinterpreting...and instead of finding it a liability, finding it an asset. And how it helps me...and when did the word shallow first appear. Comments made around me that exemplified shallow, and how I had somehow been labeled and accepted that without looking at the other side...

One of the examples Susan uses to illustrate the characteristics which do not represent shallow involves patience: "I used to say I had no patience, you know, and I was 35 before I discovered that I had tons of patience for the right things…. So that's where these reinterpretations come from."

Once the perception that she is shallow comes under reflective scrutiny, Susan begins to interpret her past actions in a different light; in essence, it allows the opportunity to link together previous experiences into a more meaningful structure. It also allows Susan a sense of self-forgiveness:

> I think it's a great sense of forgiveness for myself. If I had been a better person, and a more serious person, I would not have done some things. I was really critical of myself, and critical in a negative side. A sense of shame in many ways. Guilt and shame together. And this allows me to shed some of that…put it into context, look at it in the big picture. Or seeing how some of these decisions have ultimately led to the discovery of greater potential. At the time [when these events occurred] I couldn't explain it. I just needed to get out. Get away. But now I see some other threads there…hope will do a great thing.

Susan indicates that prior to her new understanding of the issues surrounding shallowness, she was more critical of herself than others and this creates a "strong sense of vulnerability." The negative impact of events early in her life create the desire to be "better than others…be smarter, be more achieving, be more responsible, be more dependable, be more of everything." Today, Susan is more relaxed, less serious, more open to the simple things in life, and less critical of herself; in essence, she discovers the depths of her shallowness.

Escaping the Boundaries of Prison

In the latter part of her life, Susan works within the federal corrections system. She realizes prison is an apt metaphor which symbolizes her deeper layers of reflection:

> Going to the prison is for me identifying how much I am in prison by my own sense of labels, values, and everything else. So it forces me to re-examine some of my understandings. You know, recognizing similarities in a completely different setting and seeing the potential that is there.

One of the understandings Susan re-examines while working within the prison system is the way in which she sets personal boundaries.

Until the age of 35 when she begins to reflect seriously about her sense of being shallow, Susan typically avoids certain situations which trigger emotional issues. The triggers tend to define her boundaries, many of which are responses to deep seated emotional experiences from her past. However, she gradually learns to challenge the triggers, even though many are "subtle and sneak up on you," and comes to understand the things that used "to be an embarrassment" in her life actually provide assets in her work. As an example, Susan describes her discomfort when in the presence of tall people, particularly tall men:

> The taller they are the further away I would stay. To me, it is the big person, the little person; the child, the adult. So, I never dated tall men. I remember the first time where somebody fairly tall, and looking the part of a convict, approaches my desk. I'm sitting down, and he walks in my space. I look at him, and say 'you're in my space, would you back up?' And he looks at me surprised. 'I said, you're in my space. Give me more elbow space.' And he did. You know, there was no issue there. Before, it would have been a very traumatic experience.

As Susan begins to challenge her previous sets of boundaries, she starts recognizing parts of herself in the actions of others; in turn, this helps her "suspend judgment" when interacting with others. Although she first notices this trend as an outcome from her earlier counseling sessions, it becomes a valuable skill she learns to use while working in the prison system. The sessions help her to

> see the potential in people, and basically I could recognize myself in these people. The whole approach to empowerment and traumatic events and experience…you don't have to be a victim of it for the rest of your life. You can pick yourself up, put the pieces together.

As she moves into doing group work with the men in the prison, Susan finds herself listening and connecting in ways that do not confirm her previous boundary limitations. The following narrative illustrates both her recognition of herself in others and the process of how she comes to reinterpret the frame of abuse.

> When I work with the groups of men, I am able to listen to where they are coming from. And seeing that sometimes there is a very small margin between being the abused and becoming the abuser. Very narrow margin. And I had experienced that once. I had an uncle that had been the abuser, and I remember after I started doing some healing and therapy, I thought I should be generous and forgive him. I was going to their home for supper. In my family, we do not touch, we're not physical people. We were physical in discipline, but we were not physical in loving. And I went towards him to give him a hug. On his face, as I approached him with my arms open, I could see the fear. I could see that fear, it was right there, and I must admit, it felt good. There was a part of me that said, oh, now you know what it feels like. You know what it feels like, and if I had been healed, I would have been able to pull back my hug. I didn't. I walked. I knew he was afraid, and I gave him a hug anyway. And, and I enjoyed the fact that he was afraid. So, for me, that was the very small line between being the abused and becoming the abuser.

Susan feels there is a "mutual sense of healing in these experiences," and the boundaries she sets today are ones which she chooses to set, rather than the uncritically assimilated ones from her past. On occasion, an old boundary provokes a negative feeling; however, she now recognizes the process and is able to sift through the refuse to locate and deal with the roots.

Today, Susan displays a curious excitement about her life that suggests the transformation is indeed ongoing, as well as a determination to continue learning.

The metaphorical prison boundaries no longer encapsulate her, and she exudes her new sense of freedom.

Summary

Susan's life unfolds as a series of experiences which allow deep insight into the ways in which transformation and reflection hinge with each other. Her early years include recognitions of both family and cultural expectations, and involve surprisingly deep understandings from a relatively young age. The responsibilities she assumes as a young child push her to challenge the predetermined roles she seems destined to fulfill, and the presence of their lingering effects are detectable till her early thirties. Overall, the essence of her transformation appears to represent a quest for freedom from the prison of being shallow.

The first major theme, *Perspective Foundations*, provide a clear example of how meaning perspectives are formed during the childhood years. As Mezirow suggests, it is not till later in adulthood that we come to recognize and challenge them in a manner that can promote change. The sub-theme *Living Parallel Lives* appears to involve a combination of content and process reflections as she realizes both what and how she lives parallel lives. However, Susan also display an early level of introspection, which Mezirow defines as thinking about our thoughts and feelings in a nonreflective capacity, as she recalls the feelings of anger which pivot around her mother's numerous pregnancies. In the second sub-theme, entitled *Escaping Tradition*, we can detect the same levels of introspection about the cultural influences. We also see another strong link between the content reflection where she realizes she is still taking care of everybody, which represents the what; and the process reflection where she addresses the feelings of anger associated with taking care of everybody, which represents the how. There also appears to be some indication that two meaning schemes involving her direction in life and her sense of self respect come under scrutiny, and ultimately shift through her choice to move to Alberta.

In the second major theme, *Searching for Meaning*, a number of content and process reflections seem apparent, as well as the associated shifts in meaning schemes. In the sub-theme *A New Self*, Susan engages in a content reflection when she re-encounters her old friends in Montreal and realizes that she does not wish to pursue the old way of living. After her hysterectomy, a deep process reflection is evident as she searches for ways to satisfy the maternal instinct. This leads to an expanded meaning scheme about being a parent when she chooses to adopt a child. Other content and process reflections seem to emerge from her sessions with the therapist as she begins to examine the sources of her anger. To some extent, this also has elements of becoming aware of the unsurfaced feelings that reside in the realm of presentational construal. During the *Soul Searching* of the third sub-theme, Susan reflects in a way that seems congruent with Mezirow's premise reflection. With the help of her therapist, she begins to understand how the early family and cultural expectations have a shaping influence in her current life, which seems to represent the initial stages of a psychological premise reflection. Another instance occurs as she spends time with the native elders, and comes to learn and respect a different source of knowledge that is not rationally based. This reflection seems to be predicated on an epistemic premise.

The third major theme, entitled *Discovering the Depths of Shallowness*, provides the clearest indication of a premise reflection. As Susan begins *Exploring Shallow* in the first sub-theme, she comes to understand how an early labeling process of being shallow tends to shape her perceptions of self throughout much of her life. She reinterprets the essence of shallow, and comes to see her early experiences as assets rather than liabilities. It also provides a sense of self forgiveness, and the ability to "see the big picture." The second sub-theme, *Escaping the Boundaries of Prison*, provides a metaphorical interpretation of how the previous liabilities become assets in her work. In essence, the psychological, sociolinguistic, and epistemic perspectives appear to transform into ones that are more open and integrative.

CHAPTER 6

THE SCRIPT OF GUILT

The third research participant is Peter, a 40 year old Caucasian male who is intelligent, confident, and possesses an athletic edge that translates into a keen awareness of his surroundings. He currently enjoys a successful career working with troubled teens, addictions, and family therapy situations; those people with whom he comes into contact through work share a high level of respect for his abilities. He defines transformation to be mostly "reflective reasoning, that kind of approach...so transformation for me is just how I reflect on my experience, and in turn how that changes the way I think and the way I do things." In this chapter, the reader will experience a slightly different transformative process than with the previous participants. For Peter, the process unfolds gradually, and is more subtle; however, he ultimately comes to understand himself with a different perspective.

Theme Description

The themes emerge as a set of contrasts and tensions between sources of external influence and the subsequent internal reflective processes in which Peter engages; accordingly, these become the two major themes under which meaning is made from the experiences. The first major theme, entitled *External Challenges*, explores the external influences which trigger Peter to reflect about certain aspects of his life. These external influences are also the sources that provide him with cues which indicate some change occurs. Two sub-themes are developed: the first, *Reinterpreting Self Worth*, explores how early childhood experiences shape Peter's sense of self worth, and the ways in he resolves the problem; the second sub-theme, entitled *Social Mirrors*, explores the reflections in which Peter becomes more flexible by recognizing his actions through the actions of others.

The second major theme, *Circles of Learning*, explores the deepening and circular ways in which Peter understands and achieves a sense of balance within himself. Within the *Circles of Learning*, two sub-themes emerge: the first, entitled *Changing Internal Meaning*, explores what it means to participate in relationships; and the second, entitled *New Scripts of Meaning*, explores how Peter reinterprets his perspective about feeling guilty.

This chapter is organized in a manner which allows the reader to first meet the participant, and then follow the development through the two major themes mentioned above. In essence, the themes are best understood as being in juxtaposition with each other; that is, the external observations and influences from others seem to stimulate the internal reflection in a way that suggests the internal depends on the external.

Meeting the Participant

Peter spent his early years growing up in central Alberta, the eldest of seven siblings. His education includes a BA in psychology and sociology, a B.Sc in science, a certificate in public administration, a certificate in child care counseling, and current enrollment in an education after degree. As part of his earlier years attending a central Alberta college, Peter serves as president and vice-president of the student union. He participates in competitive wrestling, and has several provincial and national championship wins to his credit. From an early age, sports play a significant role in Peter's life by supplying an opportunity to excell; somewhat paradoxically, it is also sports that initiate the first reflections which challenge a deeply rooted set of assumptions and expectations.

From our first meeting, it is clear that Peter exudes a genuine interest in helping people and takes pride in achieving high standards with his work and activities. He is willing to share his experiences, and displays a keen interest in the area of transformative learning. The interviews unfold in a manner which is considerably different than those of the other research participants, and the length of the dialogues are shorter on average.

Throughout the interviews, Peter uses the term "reflective reasoning," which he defines as "reflecting on your life experience, reflecting on the moment. It's a number of things that have built one on top of another, and they kind of reinforce each other." When asked about the difference between reflective reasoning and reflection, he responds:

> I think the reflection is just a piece of it. The reflection is just checking back…what is my experience and how does it fit with the situation right now. I think with the reasoning, I spend a lot more time in my head. Reflection might just be right off the top of the head…kind of integrated …like a problem solving approach, as compared to the other one is much more deep. [Reasoning] is not just cognitive, it's emotional, it's a whole bunch of different things that are kind of being brought together.

External Challenges

The first major theme pivots around a series of external influences which supply the impetus for Peter to begin reflecting about his assumptions and expectations. These external influences include observations from others about his behavior, and in essence, supply the initial cues which motivate Peter to question some fundamental beliefs about himself. Ultimately, this process reveals a set of tensions between the personal and the social aspects of his life. The significance of this theme emerges as the initial indications of reflections that begin to challenge an adopted way of thinking and acting.

Reinterpreting Self-Worth

Peter refers to his early years continually throughout the interviews, and it is clear that his childhood experiences play a significant role in developing a set of tensions around what he feels he deserves from life. At an early age, Peter assumes a key responsibility in the raising of his siblings, and suggests his mother raised "me to be a good mom, [which] means that I do the cooking… breakfast in the morning from the time I am 9 or 10 years old. So by the time I am 12, I am pretty well established in that role…. A lot of my time was spent just watching kids when my mother decides she needs a break." As such, his own needs are seen as secondary to those of his siblings and parents. Peter acknowledges he "comes from a family that has [a great deal of] stress," and during his younger years, the constant tension affects him to the extent that "all I do is worry about what is in front of me."

These tensions also begin to surface through his behavior, which he says manifests as the "need for attention," and he is continually in trouble at school and with his parents. The label of "bad egg" attaches itself to Peter, and he receives "a lot of messages that say I'm a bad kid…." However, these messages are not always accurate, as the following example illustrates:

> In grade 2, I actually get 100% on this math test. As a merit award, I get this banner…a kind of extra reinforcement. So I am brought up in front of the class, and the whole nine yards. But when I take it home to my parents, I [am in trouble] because they are sure I stole it. Within two days they clear it up [by talking] to the principal and teacher…. So despite however I do at school, I am still a bad kid.

He operates under the assumption that independent of the outcome, he is still the "bad kid" who does not deserve credit for his actions. Although Peter freely admits that some of his behaviors justify the negative image, the constant reinforcement that he is not good creates a deep wound that surfaces much later in his life.

Sports become an outlet for Peter, and he excels from an early age. His accomplishments are noticed by a number of authority figures such as teachers and school principals, and gradually some of the messages begin to change tone and deviate from the "bad kid" image. The more positive messages come from a variety of sources: "I'd get them from teachers, I'd get them from the policemen who were coming to pick me up sometimes…I get the messages from a lot of people…" As a teenager, Peter experiences several encounters with the local police department, and he realizes that in order to avoid serious consequences, he must make some changes. These include developing a new social circle of friends, refraining from aggressive behaviors like street fighting, and generally becoming more aware of the potential consequences of his behavior. By the time he attends college, his sense of self focuses less on the "bad egg" image and more on the "I must be doing something right" image. Peter maintains that it takes several more years after college before he is able to explore his early life in a manner that delivers a clearer understanding of the impact his childhood years have on him.

Sports continue to play a dominant role in Peter's life, and participation in provincial and national wrestling competitions provide a window through which we can view a shift from content to process reflection. Peter frames "an interesting insight…[as] remembering through all my younger years, I move up into the high level really quickly, but when I go to national championships I never win. I win matches, but I never win the finals." During a competition in which he is winning by a considerable margin, a team-mate offers an observation that makes a significant impact on Peter:

> You were winning that match against a national champion 10 - 0, and you lost the match 11 - 10. You went out for the first round, got 10 points, and over the break I think you realized you were kicking the national champion's butt. And when you realized that, you just shut down.

This is a critical realization for Peter, and he begins to reflect about the roots of this "shutting down" behavior.

This comment from an external social source stimulates a reflective process that incorporates more than thinking about the immediate situation. In essence, he starts to unfold how the wounds of childhood affect his behavior; in turn, this leads him to question why he fails to win the wrestling match. His reflective efforts yield the conclusion that by "the time I turn 30, I realize I have been shutting myself down. It's like the idea that I don't deserve it. Don't deserve to go that far. At this point in time, I realize that's what is happening." Peter begins to look at other areas of his life where the "not deserving" principle applies, and states that:

> Even when I go to university, there's no way I deserve to get a degree. I'm surprised they even let me into college, you know. So, every time I go to school, it is the shortest play, the shortest line to the next accomplishment…I get a diploma after 2 years, I get another diploma, but I don't deserve to go to university. [When] I go to university, I'm just sweating bullets…

For Peter, the realization that many of his previous experiences are influenced by his perceived sense of self worth, or "not deserving," allows him to reinterpret his previous actions in light of the new learning: "When I say reflection, it is actually in my head. I think and spend a lot of time in my head, maybe too much, but just thinking about what I've done. It's clear. Now at this point, I realize that I have short-changed myself."

Social Mirrors

One of the clearest examples which illustrate a widening reflective process originates from an experience at work where he begins to examine his rigid way of doing things. Peter currently works with troubled teens, and situations which remind him of his youth surface on a daily basis.

> I come from a family that had a lot of problems. It is quite physically abusive, emotionally abusive, and the best therapy for me, as it turns out, is seeing these families [I work with]. I can see what the problem is. Then I start looking back and [realizing] it was the same at our house! Oh, that's why they're doing it. I've learned something from them…I am reflecting on other people's experience too, and saying yeah, I've been here before.

As he relates with these mutual experiences and reflects about their meaning, the process also provokes Peter to examine the rigidity of what he terms his "mindset." Until this point, "everything is straight ahead…I just go straight ahead and do it. But it is a fairly rigid kind of a way, and because I spend most of my time in my head, even back then, it is kind of absolute. If I read something and this is the way to go, that's it. There is no other way."

However, the rigid way of looking at and participating in the world begins to soften as his reflections reveal a set of tensions between his previous patterns and the ones he now wishes to portray. He comes to understands that the rigidity does not always serve him in the best manner by seeing his own actions and thought processes through the families he is working with in a counseling setting. Peter describes it as a "gradual lightening up" or "becoming more flexible." This unfolds as the realization "that things are not absolute," and the recognition that "gray areas play out in a lot of ways. Expectations of myself are different too. I'm no longer driven to be the top performer. And, also expectations for other people…I've kind of eased up." For Peter, the recognition of these gray areas are in contrast to his previous assumption that "I always thought I was doing the right thing. I'd reflect on where I come from, what works, and this is the way to do it. There is no consideration that other people might think differently or act differently. I just know the best way to go."

The most salient confirmation of this shift originates with comments passed on from his supervisor. On several occasions, she indicates the changes in Peter:

> My boss…I guess what she reflects on is that I've lightened up. Although she doesn't have much time with me in the first few years…[now] when I teach groups with her, she points out that I have a real soft approach. It is much gentler [than she expected in the past]…. It's no longer aggressive. I think I have taken the edge off that…

These external comments seem to be in agreement with Peter's interpretation of the changes he perceives within himself.

The less aggressive approach proves to be valuable to Peter as he moves into management roles at work. Interactions with people now include a recognition that even though their ideas may differ from his, they still have a set of skills to offer the situation. He currently describes these interactions in a manner that depicts consideration and a willingness to pay attention to his participatory roles:

> I find a lot of different types of people, some of which fit really well with me, and they look to me for [guidance] …I've become a kind of a developer person.

> I'm one of those people who likes to build people, as far as their skills are concerned. And in doing so, I think I do really great with [some of my staff]. I bring them up to the level that they need to be...and they take their own route, and it's not me just guiding it along anymore.... I look at everybody separately now.

Circles of Learning

This theme is about the circular ways in which Peter learns to create a stronger sense of balance in his life. The significance is not in the surface level conversations with Peter, but rather in the underlying meanings that seem to imply a paradox between his continual reference to "staying in his head" and the description of situations in which emotion plays a relevant role. On only two occasions throughout the interviews does Peter mention a sense of balance, which he first describes as "meaning success, and even taking strides ahead occasionally." The next reference to balance implies a much deeper meaning:

> I always thought it was a straight thinking process, but sometimes it's almost like a guilt...or just hyper sensitive. There's a whole bunch of different things that go on with me. They gang up on me for a bit, and then what I do is attempt to find some balance.

Changing Internal Meaning

Part of the balancing process for Peter involves creating communication patterns with his wife that are more open and equitable. The clearest illustration of the change emerges from a work-related course Peter takes concerning family dynamics. As the course discussions progress, he begins to identify with several of the dynamics through his personal experiences. Peter recalls one of the key highlights as the recognition of a specific dynamic which unfolds between him and his wife. During situations where they are in disagreement, Peter gives her "the silent treatment, the cold silent treatment.... [In] the course I start thinking 'I've been here! I've been doing that all this time.' And I am thinking, should I tell her?" He does tell her, and the admission has some consequences for Peter. During their next disagreement, "she actually responds differently. And that upset me. But I am thinking that it's different now. I've let the cat out of the bag and now I actually have to change. This isn't the same." In essence, his acknowledgment of the "silent treatment" process alters the balance of both the relationship and the way in which Peter understands the dynamics of the relationship. Through his reflections, he comes to realize that the "silent treatment" is not conducive to furthering communication, and that it is important to initiate change.

As Peter continues to reflect about his actions within the relationship, he notices other instances which indicate a sense of shifting balance within himself, and between him and his wife. Peter typically engages his wife by using strong emotional appeals in order to create the situation where "I'll run, you follow." However she stops following, and Peter finds himself thinking "this isn't what I expect. And I realize I want her to engage me, so now I've got to figure out another way to do that."

At this point, Peter exerts as much reflective energy thinking about his wife's actions as he does thinking about his own actions. There is a subtle transition here where Peter seems to employ the same flexibility described in an earlier theme; that is, it is "not just me guiding it along anymore" but rather a strong consideration for the thoughts and actions of others. He frames this transition around the way he currently approaches situations: "[Now] I pull her aside and say I need to talk about this. Or this is an issue for me." Peter captures the tensions created by stating "I didn't like it at the moment, but for me it was like wake up and smell the coffee. Something is different here." Now Peter is more inclined to "do a bit more reasoning, come back and say it looks like it's really important for you, and for me. I need to slow down here. Sorry about that."

New Scripts of Meaning

It is within this sub-theme that we can detect Peter's engagement with a level of reflection that is significantly different than those described earlier, which unfolds an exploration of what it means to feel guilty. Peter refers to his upbringing, and his experiences with the church as contributing to what he terms an "over developed sense of guilt." Much of this emerges from a set of expectations where he feels responsible for ensuring "things work out the way they are supposed to." Peter attends a Catholic school even though he is not Catholic, and he learns that committing a

> mortal sin [leaves] you burning in hell.... Because I am not Catholic, I can't take confession and get rid of it. So, I go home at the end of the day and spend an hour before I go to sleep...forgive me, I did this, I did this. I do all the Hail Mary's I can. I go through this every day, and it is well built into me.

During his early twenties, Peter begins to question the religious script that is built into him, but makes little reflective progress with the issue. In essence, he simply avoids attempts to attain deeper levels of understanding, and comes to view religion through a dogmatic lens. During these years in his twenties, his reflections about religion adopt an historical perspective where he challenges the roots of religious doctrine by returning to the "one mortal sin and burning in hell" script:

> It has to do with history, and realizing...how religion was formed. And reflecting back on [several] centuries, and how it really is very man made. I start to think about that...these guys all had their own agenda. I understand the doctrine. I do one mortal sin, I burn in hell. Period. Why am I buying that? Let's take another approach here.

Eventually, Peter does assume another approach, one which illustrates a much different level of reflective processes through the inclusion of values and emotion.

Peter states that not until his mid-thirties do his reflections concerning religion abandon the historical aspect, and begin a directional shift into an understanding of the relationship between himself and religion. At this point, his reflections reveal that "what is most important is how you act, and how you feel. How you value people, and how you value things, and what you do. It's a value." Although Peter does not describe himself as either religious or spiritual in an active sense, his more recent reflections indicate a deepening understanding of his perceptions and a willingness to re-interpret previous ideas:

> It's a sense of morality...I guess the sense of spirituality, if you want to call it that. Even all those dogma things...these are still part of the rules, which is kind of interesting. They're a lot easier to live with now because [they do] not have control over me. It's more like I understand what it is about, and why it made me the way I am.... It's valuing what I believe, and what I do.

The inclusion of morality and values is indicative of an understanding more in tune with a personal relationship than one which focuses on the doctrine and dogma.

Today, there is little indication that Peter retains his previous "straight ahead" approach. He describes himself as being more "tolerant with ambiguity," displays an attitude that implies genuine concern for others, and indicates a willingness to listen to ideas which differ from his. He admits that, on occasion, he reverts to his older rigid patterns, yet his reflective skills have evolved to the extent that these occasions are easily recognizable for him, and he can check himself. His current understandings promote a stronger sense of self confidence, and Peter suggests the essence of these reflections translate into "a feeling set. For me it is almost like it's self satisfying. It's the opposite of disappointed...like a little more easiness." This represents a different view than his previous "always in my head" way of thinking about and interacting with his environment. His success working in group counseling and family therapy situations indicate a capable individual who is in balance with himself and his environment. Peter continues to involve himself with wrestling, both as participant and coach.

Summary

Much of Peter's transformative experience may be described as a series of subtle changes that appear to follow what Mezirow calls transforming meaning schemes. In his situation, there is a strong presence of social and external factors that act as triggers which push him into internal reflective processes where he challenges *what* and *how* he thinks, feels, and does things. Through an extensive use of content and process reflection periods, Peter experiences a number of meaning scheme shifts which take him from "staying in his head" to developing and understanding a more balanced relationship between his cognitions and emotions. There is also evidence of a lengthy premise reflection in which he resolves his sense of guilt by reinterpreting a cognitive script instilled at an early age by the church.

Throughout the first major theme of *External Challenges*, Peter describe the early childhood situations that contribute to his beliefs about his sense of self worth. In the first sub-theme, *Reinterpreting Self Worth*, an observation from his teammate precipitates a content reflection where he examines and reassesses what he is feeling around the behavior of "shutting down." This soon shifts to a deeper process reflection as he examines how he is thinking about the problem, and how it creates confusion during previous experiences. Peter seems to create a different meaning scheme about himself by realizing that "I have short changed myself." Another external source pushes him through a similar process in the sub-theme *Social Mirrors,* and he changes his expectations of himself and others, comes to recognize that "things are not absolute," and uses these reinterpretations in his work.

In the second major theme, *Circles of Learning*, Peter describes a set of experiences which seem to represent a search for balance between his cognition and emotion. *Changing Internal Meaning* unfolds as a set of content and process reflections where he first realizes what the "silent treatment" represents, then considers how both he and his wife feel during an interaction determined by the treatment. Once again, Peter initiates change as a result of the reflective processes, and his interactions seem more resonant with a sense of balance. In the sub-theme *New Scripts of Meaning*, he appears to undergo a premise reflection concerning his sense of feeling guilty. By returning to the influences from the church, he understands how his sense of guilt becomes overdeveloped, and why it bears a strong influence in his life. In essence, he shifts from a problem solving process to a problem posing process when he asks himself: "Why am I buying that? Let's take another approach here." His resolution seems to indicate a refined perspective that is more inclusive of values and beliefs which no longer have control over him. The differences in Peter appear to be confirmed through the ways in which other people comment favorably about his current interpretations in relation to his previous interpretations.

CHAPTER 7

INTERPRETATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

As stated in the introduction, this thesis is about the reflective journeys people take to arrive at Persig's "fertile plain of understanding." Using the conceptual umbrella posited by Mezirow and a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology, the primary purpose of the research unfolds as a deliberate intent to learn more about the kinds of reflection that are associated with transformative experiences. Interviews with three research participants provide themes which capture both the essence of the transformative experience and the types of reflection associated with the transformation. According to Mezirow (1991):

> The significance of differentiating content, process, and premise reflection becomes clear when we realize that content and process reflection are the dynamics by which our beliefs - meaning schemes - are changed, that is, become reinforced, elaborated, created, negated, confirmed, or identified as problems (problematized) and transformed. Premise reflection is the dynamic by which our belief systems - meaning perspectives - become transformed. (p. 111)

In this chapter, the reader will experience the emergent data themes which tend to distinguish between content, process, and premise reflections in the transformative experiences. The chapter includes sections which discuss the essential concepts from Mezirow, validating Mezirow's reflection types, challenges to Mezirow's boundaries, implications for further research, implications for the learner, implications for adult educators, and critical reflections of the researcher.

Essential Concepts from Mezirow

For the benefit of the reader, the major conceptual points to be discussed are revisited through a brief summary. Mezirow (1991) suggests that transformation of meaning structures may occur in two different ways: through the accretion of minor changes, or through large epochal shifts. The transformation occurs as the result of reflection, which he defines as "attending to the grounds (justification) for one's beliefs" (1994, p. 223), and the reflection results in learning when "we make an interpretation…[and] subsequently use this interpretation to guide decision making or action" (1990, p.1). Within the context of this thesis, reflection refers to the intentional activities that stimulate the intellect and the affect to explore learning experiences which lead to the development of new meanings (e.g. Boud, Keogh, and Walker, 1985; Mezirow, 1991). According to Mezirow (1991), the reflection may be of three different types: content reflection, process reflection, and premise reflection. As we move through our reflections, we tend to become aware of our individual or systemic beliefs by paying attention to the ways in which external sources shape our meaning structures. Errors, distortions, and unwarranted claims become illuminated through a process of scanning, using presentational or propositional construal, and making meaning through the awareness and reinterpretation of the distorting filters which reside in the scanning and presentational construal realms. The reflections can also lead to confirmations of current meaning structures, or the creation of new meaning structures.

Validating Mezirow's Reflection Types

It appears that each of the research participants undergo a transformative experience which results in an interpretation of their meaning schemes or meaning perspective. Mezirow cites content, process, and premise reflection as the dynamics that drive the transformative process. As each participant unfolds the narrative of his or her story, it is possible to interpret certain situations in which the reflective processes are present. Although the participants are really *reflecting about their reflections* by recalling past events, the clarity of their retrospective experiences provides ample opportunity to interpret the thoughts and feelings as being representative of the types of reflection outlined by Mezirow. All three participants are able to indicate moments in their lives where the reflection results in significant changes in how they construe meaning, which suggests the various types of reflections. The following sections weave the research data into Mezirow's theory in a manner that addresses the major research question which guided the study: "What are the kinds of reflection that are associated with a transformative experience?"

As part of the summaries of each data chapter, examples drawn from the various themes illustrate each reflective type, and yet still attempt to keep the context of the experience in focus. To this extent, the experiences of Ecru, Susan, and Peter all provide strong empirical support for the conceptual framework of Mezirow. The following sections briefly revisit the data chapter summaries to reestablish the presence of content, process, and premise reflections. For comparative purposes, I also develop an example of each type of reflection through the writing of a thesis.

Content Reflection

Mezirow defines content reflection to be "reflection on *what* we think, perceive, feel, or act upon" (1990, p. 107), and generally occurs under a problem solving process. This type of reflection is intentional, generally occurs on a regular basis, and often involves specific situations where an experience may not match our expectations contained within our meaning schemes. Using the writing of this thesis as an example, when I reflect about what writing a thesis entails, I may compare it to other writing endeavors or assignments, or compare the actual experience to the anticipated experience, and come to realize it is not the same. This realization becomes problematic in that the experience of writing a thesis no longer matches my meaning scheme. As part of the resolution to this problem, I might uncover a distorted belief about thesis writing, or I might determine that I simply do not have a thesis writing meaning scheme. As I reflect about the writing experience, I reinterpret what it means to write a thesis by correcting the belief or by creating a new thesis writing meaning scheme; in essence, I learn what thesis writing is about through the content reflection on my experience.

Within the context of this research, it is possible to interpret indications of content reflection within the experiences of each participant. Ecru seems to trigger her transformation through reflections which identify what the "something is missing" feeling represents in the theme entitled *Whispers of Change*. Peter's experiences provide several examples of content reflection in the theme *External Challenges* when external sources identify inconsistencies, and he begins to reflect about what those inconsistencies are. Susan provides yet another example in the sub-theme *A New Self* when she re-encounters her old friends in Montreal and reflects about what she is feeling.

These examples also suggest that content reflections are usually triggered by external sources, involved in a problem solving process, associated with shifts in the beliefs and attitudes located in our meaning schemes, and are well suited to daily encounters. Each of these tend to further corroborate Mezirow's description of content reflection.

Process Reflection

Mezirow defines process reflection as "an examination of *how* we perform these functions of perceiving, thinking, feeling, or acting and an assessment of our efficacy in performing them" (1990, p. 108). Similar to content reflection, process reflection is intentional, generally occurs on a regular basis, and often involves specific situations where an experience may not match our expectations of our meaning scheme. Continuing with the example of writing a thesis, part of the experience may include becoming aware of how certain feelings or thoughts about thesis writing affect me. Through reflection, I might come to question how I am thinking about thesis writing, and how it is affecting what I write or how I feel. By examining my thinking processes around thesis writing, I may realize that other writing assignments required concrete thinking; however, the concrete thinking does not supply an adequate framework to assimilate the current situation of writing my thesis. In turn, I decide that abstract thinking is required and recognize the need to change; therefore, I resolve the problem by adopting an abstract thinking process and transform how I think about the thesis writing meaning scheme.

Although slightly more difficult to detect, each of the research participants utilizes a type of reflection that seems to parallel Mezirow's description of process reflection. For example, Susan's reflections about how she feels after her hysterectomy in the sub-theme *A New Self* lead to a different perception about what it means to be a parent. For both Ecru and Susan, the experiences during counseling sessions promote reflections concerning how they interpret a number of issues. This dialogue pushes them to explore both *what* they are thinking and feeling, as well as *how* they are interpreting them, and results in new interpretations. When Peter reflects about how his rigid patterns affect interactions in the theme *Social Mirrors*, he learns to become more flexible.

These examples also suggest that process reflections are externally triggered, closely linked with actions, and temporally related to meaning scheme shifts. Process reflections also appear to serve daily requirements in an effective manner. Again, these tend to further corroborate Mezirow's conceptual description of process reflection.

Premise Reflection

Of much more interest to the process of transformative learning are those instances which involve the reflection on premises. Mezirow defines premise reflection as "the dynamic by which our belief systems - meaning perspectives - become transformed" (1991, p. 111), and involves "our becoming aware of *why* we perceive, think, feel, or act as we do" (p. 108). Furthermore, the process of problem *solving* associated with content and process reflection shifts to a process of problem *posing* in premise reflection. Again using the example of writing my thesis, I may ask myself: why am I writing a thesis? This might prompt an exploration into why I feel I need to write a thesis; in turn, I may become aware of the ways in which my past experiences tend to shape this need. As I reflect about the shaping influences, I uncover a number of my beliefs about thesis writing that are distorted, unwarranted, and possibly not related to thesis writing. As I critique these assumptions, I might realize how my early childhood experiences created a need to achieve, and by recognizing these as inauthentic filters for the current situation, I reinterpret my thoughts and feelings around needs. The end result is a reflective learning process which produces a different perspective about myself and my perception of needs.

Each of the participants indicate that they can detect within themselves significant changes as a result of premise reflection. In the sub-theme *New Scripts of Meaning*, Peter reflects about the influence the church has on him, and emerges with a different interpretation of his values and beliefs. Susan uncovers the reasons behind a lifelong interpretation that she is shallow in the *Discovering the Depths of Shallowness* theme, and Ecru challenges the patriarchal model as part of the *Rediscovering Self* theme.

The premise reflections identified in this research seem to support Mezirow's suggestion that "the transformation of a meaning perspective, which occurs less frequently, is more likely to involve our sense of self and always involves critical reflection upon the distorted premises sustaining our structure of expectation" (1991, p.167). However, there are other similarities, including the use of discourse and problem posing.

As a prelude to their premise reflections, all of the participants engage in some form of discourse which illuminates a problem, or sets in motion particular feelings or thoughts that gradually push them into a reflection about their sociolinguistic, psychological, or epistemic premises. For Susan and Ecru, counseling provides a significant means by which they become aware of their interpretations, and allows them the opportunity to reflect about and reinterpret past experiences. Peter first begins to reflect about the feelings of guilt as he works with families in a counseling setting.

It is also evident that each participant re-frames the nature of the problem. According to Mezirow's theory about transformative learning, the content and process reflection that leads to transforming meaning schemes unfolds as a problem *solving* process, whereas the premise reflection that leads to transforming meaning perspectives is a problem *posing* process. This context appears to be one of the ways in which premise reflections can be differentiated from content and process reflections. The experiences of the participants in this study tend to support the idea that premise reflections typically involve a re-orientation to *why* there is a problem. The clearest example comes from Peter as he explores his sense of guilt in the sub-theme *New Scripts of Meaning* when he asks himself "Why am I buying that? Let's take another approach here."

In summary, the various themes and sub-themes which emerge from this study seem to support Mezirow's conceptual interpretation of the three kinds of reflection as they relate to a transformative experience. The participants relate the thoughts, feelings, and intuitions of their experiences in a clear and articulate manner that allows the individual voices of content, process, and premise reflection to surface. The ways in which these voices precipitate action and subsequent meaning structure shifts seem to substantiate the transformative nature of their learning. There is also a strong presence of internal struggles and charged emotions in each of the reflective processes.

Challenges to Mezirow's Boundaries

Despite the confirmatory presence of content, process, and premise reflection in this research, two findings appear to challenge the boundaries of transformative learning through the Mezirowian interpretation. The first involves the idea that certain types of premise reflection may lead to different transformative experiences which alter the ways of reflecting; the second involves the difficulty in disentangling the reflective types in relation to a meaning structure transformation.

Different Types of Premise Reflections

Within the context of this research, it appears that two different kinds of transformation occur. Although Peter, Susan, and Ecru all seem to develop perspectives that are "more inclusive, discriminating, permeable (open), and integrative of experience" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 111) through premise reflection, a contrast of their experiences reveals a significant difference. This difference involves epistemic perspective reflections and presentational construal. According to Mezirow, epistemic perspectives refer to our assumptions about the nature and use of knowledge, and include such things as scope of awareness, global or detail focus, and concrete or abstract thinking. Presentational construal involves the tacit knowledge and pre-linguistic structures that influence our interpretations, and the "feelings, intuition, dreams, and changes in physiological states bring the influences of presentational construal into awareness" (p. 24). In contrast, propositional construal involves cognition and comprehension, and may monitor "presentational construal by introducing rational and reflective interpretations of our presentational awareness" (1991, p. 24).

As Peter reflects about his sense of feeling guilty, he uncovers how the early influences from the church shape his understanding of what the feeling means. The reflections lead him to reinterpret his meaning around guilt as his perspective expands, but it appears to stay in the same realm; that is, despite the shift, his construal of meaning continues to originate from a rational and cognitive realm. In this sense, the perspective is transformed, but the reflective process remains the same. In contrast, both Ecru and Susan expand their interpretation of legitimate knowledge sources. As part of her transformation, the intuition, guided imageries, and mediations provide Ecru with a different way of reflecting and interpreting meaning. In a similar sense, the native elders teach Susan to become aware of the energies within her environment, and she also uses them as part of her reflections and interpretation of meaning. Both experience significant shifts in the perception of spiritual awareness in a way that they actually come to understand and use knowledge from a realm that is neither rational nor cognitive in nature.

They seem to transcend their previous boundaries involving the sources of knowledge to view the new boundary as legitimate, and become capable of using both as part of their reflective processes. To this extent, we can say that the result of the premise reflection is different: in Peter's case, no new reflective process develops; in Susan and Ecru's case, a new way of reflecting develops in that they pay attention to and use the intuition and energies that are not rationally based. Mezirow does not address the issue that premise reflection holds the potential to actually alter the subsequent reflective processes.

Content Reflection and Meaning Scheme Shifts

The experiences of the participants suggest some difficulty in disentangling process reflection from content reflection in relation to the transformation of meaning schemes; that is, the actual action and resolution of the problem seems to occur after a process reflection. There seems to be little evidence from this research that content reflection is capable of precipitating a meaning scheme shift by itself; rather, the content reflection appears to require the accompaniment of a related process reflection before any significant shift occurs.

In situations where no deliberate assessment of our prior learning occurs, we can still address problems by using what Mezirow terms thoughtful action. In essence, we draw upon our prior learning to make evaluations or judgments about our environment and perform nonreflective actions. However, Mezirow does not state that content reflection, by itself, is enough to precipitate a meaning scheme shift; rather, at the conceptual level, it is always coupled with process reflection. Although the types of reflection are clearly different, the outcomes of each type are not clear, either conceptually or empirically.

Implications for Further Research

The meanings interpreted from this study may have several implications for the perspective transformation Mezirow advocates. Despite Mezirow's claim that transformation "theory is intended to be a comprehensive, idealized, and universal model consisting of the generic structures, elements, and processes of adult learning" (1994, p. 222), the life stories discussed in this research do not seem to support the sense of serving a "universal model." The key areas within Mezirow's theory which seem to require further research are presented below as a series of questions that emerge from this study.

What are the relationships between content, process, and premise reflection?

Although this study offers support for Mezirow's distinction between content, process, and premise reflection, the problem of determining when one finishes and another begins poses interesting questions concerning the relationships between the types of reflection. In particular, the problem of disentangling content and process reflection seems to challenge the value of discerning between the two. Perhaps they should be referred to as both contributing in a collective manner to a process of problem solving, or a way to transform meaning schemes. Furthermore, the complexities involved with premise reflection suggest that both content and process reflection become encapsulated within the broader sense of premise reflection. More research which delineates the differences and relationships, or lack thereof, between the types of reflection will help to clarify the value of separating reflection into different types.

Can the reflective processes be neatly labeled, or do people reflect in different ways?

As discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, Taylor's (1995) review of the empirical research using Mezirow's theory of transformation does not identify studies which explicitly address content, process, and premise reflection. This leaves us with somewhat prescriptive definitions involving the types of reflection, and consequently may pose certain limitations on how we understand these meanings. Within the context of this study, it appears that each of the participants engage in content, process, and premise reflection; however, this study also illuminates differences in the ways the participants reflect. As a result of incorporating spiritual and intuitive influences into their reflections, both Ecru and Susan seem to go beyond the imposed rational and cognitive boundaries. In contrast, Peter remains anchored within a rational interpretation. This would seem to suggest that the prescriptive definitions offered by Mezirow require further research in order to attain a more universal application to the transformative process. Furthermore, research which focuses on the differing ways in which people reflect may contribute to a clearer understanding of the area.

To what extent is our ability to reflect limited by our understanding of reflection?

Somewhat related to the question posed above is the notion that the meanings we as individuals attach to reflection may influence how we reflect. In other words, it is possible that we utilize a set of assumptions and premises about reflection which impose limitations on our abilities to understand, interpret, and communicate our reflective experiences. Each of the participants in this study offer differing views about what transformation and reflection means. The clearest example emerges from Peter, who suggests that reflective reasoning is deeper than reflection; consequently, his reflective processes remain in the cognitive "reasoning" realm. In contrast, both Susan and Ecru indicate a greater willingness to include emotional and spiritual aspects in their understanding; consequently, their reflection processes extend beyond the cognitive realm. One way in which future research might address this inconsistency with Mezirow's theory is to adopt methodologies and literature reviews which focus on anthropological interpretations of reflection and transformation.

Implications for the Learner

Assuming that learning under the rubric of transformation theory occurs in a widespread manner, understanding more about content, process, and premise reflections has a number of implications for the learner. There is often evidence of personal struggle and confusion within a transformative process, thus the ability to identify and recognize some of the concomitant characteristics associated with the types of reflections may enhance the learning experience.

1. Understanding what happens during reflective processes may help to prepare the learner for a set of potential tensions which may occur between the internal and the external points of reference. Also realizing that critical reflection, or premise reflection, often includes the need to reveal one's inner thoughts, feelings, and emotions may assist in coping with these events when they occur. In essence, tensions may result as a reluctance to reveal oneself, whether to the external world or to the internal perception of what self is. This would suggest that part of reflection means an acceptance or an ability to commit oneself to a process of self discovery.

2. Understanding the relationships between reflection and transformative learning provides the learner with a possible framework under which he or she may integrate and interpret life experiences in a more meaningful way, and to understand them in relation to their educational experiences. Since many adult educators advocate reflection to be a critical component to their instructional goals, the framework may allow both learners and educators to understand the language, and points of reference, as having the same, or similar meanings. In this manner, the learner is offered at least one way of understanding new learning opportunities. This in not to suggest that reflection and transformation provide the only way to understand; rather, reflection and transformation provide the learner with another choice in how they interpret meaning.
3. Understanding more about reflection, especially premise reflection, supplies the learner with the potential to promote and increase levels of self confidence, feelings of self worth, and self growth. These seem to be common outcomes from premise reflections, and provide the learner with a potential goal which may stimulate continued learning. Once again, understanding more about reflection offers the learner one possible alternative to understand educational experiences, but it is not the only alternative.
4. Understanding that reflection may be used as a means to promote balance in their life provides the learner with an anchor that may prevent the simple replacement of one distorted meaning structure with another. Using content and process reflection seems to deliver effective solutions to problems on a daily basis. If the

learner is willing to engage in the deeper levels of critical reflection and problem posing, then the outcome is predicated on thoughtful and reflective action rather than thoughtless and non-reflective action.

5. Understanding the ways in which construal and reflection are linked provides the learner with the opportunity to interpret the dreams, intuitions, and changes in physiological states associated with presentational construal into meaningful learning experiences. Realizing that propositional construal can involve strong elements of social discourse encourages the learner to be more willing to participate in the dialogic process.

Implications for Adult Educators

The term *reflection* appears so often throughout the adult education with so many different interpretations of its meaning that it is possible the field comes to accept it as an uncritically assimilated premise. As Newman (1994) indicates, the interpretation of the term evolves through a series of theoretical positions which posit numerous understandings of the process. Therefore, knowledge about content, process, and premise reflection can benefit those engaged in the delivery of adult education in the following ways.

1. The first way involves the adult educator as learner. If we are to assume that part of an adult educator's role to is reflect critically upon their practice (eg. Brookfield, 1986, 1994), then each of the elements discussed in the section above entitled Implications for the Learner apply to the educator. In this sense, the

educator may become aware of certain activities, behaviors, or beliefs which no longer seem authentic or capable of supplying effective frames reference. Understanding more about the reflective processes may assist in the general process of reflecting upon one's practice.

2. A second way involves the educator as educator. For those educators who support the social and emancipatory aspects of adult education, recognizing and distinguishing the reflective processes in which their learners engage should allow for some instructional advantage. For example, distinguishing between an emotionally laden premise reflection and an everyday occurrence of content reflection allows the educator to engage with the learner at a level which is appropriate to the reflection type. Furthermore, if the goal is to promote critical reflection, then awareness of the time and opportunity required for the development of critical reflection allows the educator to plan the course or program accordingly and realistically. It would seem that teaching someone *how* to reflect about their premises is less achievable than providing the opportunity and the environment under which the premise reflections *might* occur. On the other hand, understanding more about the content and process of premise reflection encourages the educator to create opportunities and environments that are more likely to promote learning within a transformative context.
3. Another benefit for the adult educator as educator to understand more about the types of reflection involves ethical considerations. Since it seems apparent that premise reflection has the potential to create feelings of vulnerability and

challenges to self-esteem within the learner, a deeper understanding of the issues involved seems to present the educator as being more accountable. Few adult educators are trained as professional counselors capable of dealing with crisis situations; therefore, recognition of the kinds of things that may accompany premise reflections allow the educator to provide supportive environments that may assist the learner in coping with potentially uncomfortable situations.

Critical Reflections of the Researcher

The purpose of this research unfolded as a personal interest in developing a firm conceptual understanding of the literature surrounding the Mezirowian interpretation of transformative learning, and a deliberate intent to learn more about the kinds of reflection that are associated with transformative experiences. To this extent, I can say that I achieved my personal interests; however, I became acutely aware of the difficulties associated with conducting research on this topic. Translating conceptual frameworks into tenable empirical studies involved suspending a number of judgments and biases. Although attempts were made to bracket these potential influences, I began to realize the particular ideology that surrounds making interpretations of meaning. In reference to the types of reflection posited by Mezirow, there is an ideology pertaining to reflection; that is, we understand the process within a set of cultural and language limitations. In essence, I began to reflect about my critical reflections.

As a result of my reflections, my sense of what it means to reflect and undergo a transformative experience has been challenged. The participants in this research provided several insights which do not seem to fit the pattern of transformation described by Mezirow. In particular, the difficulties disentangling content and process reflection in relation to transforming meaning schemes leads me to question the value in making the distinction between the two. If both content and process reflection are required to shift a meaning scheme, then determining the *whats* and *hows* of reflection do not seem to increase our understanding of transformation.

On the other hand, distinguishing between premise reflection, and content and process reflection as a singular entity, is a valuable contribution. Premise reflections associated with problem posing seem to stimulate deeper and ultimately more profound learning than the problem solving activities associated with content and process reflection. In this manner, Mezirow provides a valuable tool to assist our understanding of the relationships between reflection and transformation.

As I worked through the life stories of my research participants, I became aware of another way in which Mezirow's theory seemingly fails to provide an encompassing account of reflection. Determining exactly which type of reflection appeared to be evident required an unfolding of content, process, and premise reflection. It seemed that each of the types contained within them characteristics associated with the other types. For example, it became evident that within content reflection, there exists a content (what is the reflection about), a process (how is the reflection occurring), and a premise (why is the reflection occurring). To this extent, Mezirow may supply an overly simplistic interpretation of reflection as it pertains to transformative theory. If the distinctions between the types of reflection can be challenged at this root level, it is entirely possible that more sophisticated challenges might emerge from further research in this area.

As part of the research process, I came to develop a slightly different belief about what transformative learning really means. At the outset of the research, I was not convinced that the Jungian approach to transformation was an area that belonged in adult education; instead, I viewed it as a predominantly therapeutic resource. As I worked through the experiences of my research participants, it became evident that portions of the Jungian approach were quite relevant to adult education. The idea that people can connect with presentational construal in a way that allows them to use it, as opposed to simply being aware of it, closely parallels the notions of discernment and non-egoic types of dialogue. To this extent, I now realize that Mezirow's theory is not as inclusive as I thought at the beginning of my research.

I also developed a healthy respect for the importance of dialogue as an essential component of interpreting meaning. When I moved away from the university environment, I lost much of my "support" group. During the final steps of completing the thesis, I had few people with whom I could converse about the nature and meaning of my research; to this extent, it became a lonely and sometimes frustrating period of my life.

I developed a strong respect for the participants who made this research possible. Their willingness to share experiences so that others might learn requires a sense of courage and self confidence. As the interviews proceeded, they helped me learn about reflection and about myself as I reflected about my own experiences through a different window of understanding. Their experiences also reinforced an expanded understanding of the importance of dialogic connections.

As I began to write this thesis, the meaning of my research began to come together, I discovered the underlying meaning of Van Manen's (1990) statement: "to write is to rewrite" (p. 131). However, I also discovered the ways in which the meaning I interpreted seemed to become deeper with each rewrite.

A qualitative study never ends, nor does it conclude; similar to a transformative experience, it is a continuous journey. There is a point when the data and the interpretations become saturated, and the decision is made to stop. It is at this point that I make that decision.

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APPENDIX A

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

Have you undergone an experience or set of experiences which have made a strong impact on your life? Do you feel the experience or experiences have somehow changed how you think about adult life? Do you think you can recall these experiences and identify how they changed you?

If you are interested in sharing your experiences, and feel comfortable talking about them, I would appreciate hearing from you. I am conducting a research project about reflection, and how it relates to those experiences which seem to transform our lives. For these purposes, I require three or four people who have the ability to articulate the depth of their experiences. The information collected will be used in a thesis written for a Masters degree in Adult Education.

Approximately five hours of your time would be required over the next two or three months in the form of a brief written description of your experiences, and confidential interviews with the researcher. Any information you might be willing to supply will remain confidential and anonymous. Hopefully, this research experience will be rewarding and beneficial for both of us.

If you are interested, please contact Bill Deneff at 439-1882, and leave a message indicating how I might contact you. Thank you for your interest.

APPENDIX B

EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH FORM

Thank you for your interest in this study. The intent of this form is to explain the purpose of the research, and to clearly indicate what your participation means.

Within adult education, there is a current learning theory which is concerned with how people come to make meaning, and how it is that they learn. Basically, it suggests that people often use interpretation in order to understand the meaning of a variety of situations. Some of this interpretation involves the use of internal frameworks, called meaning structures, which are often based upon ideas that have been uncritically assimilated. These meaning structures tend to become habits of expectation, and thus tend to act as filters through which we see and understand new experiences. One of the ways that we can counter this filtering process is to become aware of how our perspectives are formed, and how they are maintained. This is done by the use of reflection, or the process we typically use when we consider the "hows, whats, and whys" of our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Once we begin to reflect, we become more alert to how our perspectives are shaped by forces beyond our immediate awareness. We can then make some attempt to "transform" them so that they become more permeable, more open to ideas different from our own, and less likely to be influenced by old habits of expectation. Not surprisingly, the theory is called transformative learning.

However, not everyone in adult education agrees about how transformation occurs, or what the most important aspects are. Furthermore, the topic requires more empirical research to help identify problem areas, and to strengthen other areas. The basic purpose of this research is to expand our understanding of how the processes of reflection influence and determine those experiences which seem to change how we view the world. Your participation will assist in further developing an important aspect of adult education.

The basic interest of this research is the reflection process. If you decide you are interested in this research, I will ask you to write a few paragraphs describing an experience, or set of experiences which you feel changed or altered your life in some meaningful way. Although everyone's experiences are important and valuable, some are more suitable to this research than others. As a result, it is possible that not all of the people interested in this project will be asked to participate further. After reading your paragraphs, I will contact you and let you know the outcome.

If you are invited to participate further, you will be asked to participate in a minimum of two interviews with the researcher, each lasting between one and two hours. The researcher will present a number of questions which will ask you to recall experiences which fit into the category of transformative, and to recollect what you were thinking, how you were feeling, and possible related actions you performed. Some of the questions will relate to events and situations which followed the transformative experience. Each interview will be tape-recorded, and then transcribed for detailed analysis. The information you provide will remain completely confidential, and only the researcher will have access to your complete responses. The researcher will use selected quotes from the interview in the thesis, but each participant will be assigned a false name to provide complete anonymity. The researcher will also provide you with a copy of the transcribed interview, and offer the opportunity for you to supply feedback regarding the interpretations of the research. Your participation and feedback is considered to be very valuable.

Although none of the questions are designed to intimidate or cause personal harm, sometimes recalling past experiences can be rather emotional. If at any time you feel uncomfortable, or wish further clarification, please feel free to indicate this to the researcher.

Thank you for your interest in this research, and I hope it will be a rewarding experience for both of us. Researcher: Bill Deneff 439-1882

APPENDIX C

Participant Consent Agreement

I agree to participate in a research study about reflection and transformative learning. I understand the purpose and nature of the study, and feel comfortable that it has been adequately explained to me. I understand that the interviews in which I participate will be tape recorded. I grant permission to the researcher to use any information collected as partial fulfillment toward the completion of a Master's Degree in Adult Education, and any future publications.

I understand that I have the option to withdraw from the study at any time. I also understand that if I feel uncomfortable answering any question, I have the right to decline to answer.

I understand that any information I provide will remain confidential and anonymous.

I understand that the research study is not intended to be threatening to myself or anyone else.

____________________	____________________
Research Participant	Researcher
____________________	____________________
Date	Date

APPENDIX D

Questions to Guide Semi-Structured Interview

1. Could you tell me a little bit about your early life?
2. What does transformation mean for you?
3. What does reflection mean for you?
4. What are some of the changes you feel you have undergone?
5. What are some ways in which you feel you are different?
6. How would you have thought about (whatever) before you began to reflect?
7. How do you think your friends (or others) perceived the changes?
8. Can you describe how you feel your reflection has changed?

Probe questions:

1. Could you explain that in more detail?
2. How did you decide to do............?
3. How did you feel about that........?
4. Can you give an example........?
5. What was it like to tell others..........?
6. Did you always assume this...........?
7. When did the idea first arise...........?